

· MEN ·  
· OF · GOOD ·  
· WILL ·

JULES ROMAINS

*Translated by Warren B. Wells.*

Book I

*The Sixth of October*

Book II

*Quinette's Crime*



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## PREFACE



I HONESTLY believe that a preface is useless except when it is indispensable. If I have decided to write this one to *Men of Good Will*, I imply that I consider it to be indispensable.

It is so for this reason, in the first place : the work whose publication begins with this volume will be of very considerable dimensions. The reader will not necessarily realise that fact beforehand. If he does not realise it, he may gather an erroneous impression of this opening volume, and may apply a criterion of judgment to it which is lacking in foundation.

It is obvious that you judge a building in different ways if it is intended to be self-sufficing or if, on the contrary, it constitutes only a portico. Onlookers who pass by it while it is under construction and air their opinions about the purpose and proportions of the portico will probably be very far wide of the mark if they fail to appreciate the fact that the architect has so far covered only a small part of the site.

Some people may pull me up here and point out to me that thoughtful architects surround their site with a high paling as long as the building is unfinished, in order to spare their contemporaries errors of judgment which may make them blush afterwards. In other words, would it not be better, when one is publishing a work of these dimensions, to wait until it is finished ?

This advice is easy to give. But those who give it would be the first to raise a howl if one brought them a whole pile

of volumes one fine day and said to them : " Here, read this. It's a novel." They would protest that it was a piece of impudence to demand such an effort from the reading public all at once, that it was going out of one's way to discourage them, and even that it was an abominable manifestation of arrogance. Would it not, as a matter of fact, amount to saying : " Other writers, my modest brethren of the pen, ask you for one of your evenings, or a couple at the most, and let it go at that. They are right, for that is all they are worth. But for my part, I ask you for a week or so out of your life. You must not go to the theatre any more. You must not go and dine out any more. I am going to shut you up with me " ?

I do not think that there is any possible answer to this argument which can be decently put forward. A work of such a scope as this can only be offered to the reader serially – at least to the contemporary reader. When it figures as a whole on a book-shelf – if it has that good fortune – future readers will know for themselves whether it is worth while to read all these volumes ; and, if they want to read them, they will be able to find the time to do it. They will be forewarned. It is only fair that contemporaries should be forewarned too.

This preface of mine may also serve to forestall another misconception. The reader, having acquired a vague idea that there is going to be " a whole series of volumes," may say to himself : " Yes, I know all about that. This is a question of a sequence of novels, more or less associated with one another. The author himself has not the least idea beforehand how many there are going to be. If the first volumes get a good reception, he will string out the series ; or if they do not, he will cut it short. If some of the characters appeal to the reader, the author will feature them in subsequent adventures."

This is not the case. What I am writing here is one single novel, and its plot has been drafted in advance. The author knows exactly what is going to happen in the fourth volume.

If it does not conform to what the reader wants, the author will be very sorry ; but he will not be able to do anything about it.

I may, indeed, go further even than that. There are novels in several volumes already in existence, which constitute a single unit and develop in accordance with a preconceived plan. But they can convey no idea of what I am endeavouring to do. For their unity these novels depend upon one central character, whom they follow in all the different phases of his life ; or else upon a single family, which they accompany from generation to generation. In *Men of Good Will*, on the other hand, there is no central character ; and most of my characters have no link of relationship between them.

“What you want to do,” ill-disposed persons will tell me, “is to distinguish yourself from your predecessors at all costs.” Not at all. But what I have tried to do is to represent reality as I see it – just as honestly as a painter tries to represent the landscape that he sees before his eyes.

What I see before my eyes is life in the twentieth century, our own life as modern men. I face the fact that this life of ours is very difficult to group around any central character ; that, indeed, it obstinately refuses to be so grouped ; and that it refuses to be so much more than used to be the case. A century ago it may not have been absurd to make the whole life of a city like Paris gravitate around a single individual, and associate everything with the experiences of one man. To-day, in my belief, it would be rather ridiculous.

I also face the fact that, in the world as I see it, families are not of very much importance. They are in certain cases ; but they are not in the common run of life. One can – indeed, one should – find a place for them in the picture. But confining oneself to depicting a family is not painting the present-day scene, nor is it interpreting its spirit.

For all this I am not responsible. You may regret the strong factor of unity – strong and simple – which a central character, or at most one family, imparted to a work of fiction. I regret it myself. But it is a question of making

up our minds whether we prefer a factor of unity or the living truth in our picture ; or, to put it better, whether we propose to hold on at any price, when we are depicting the world that we have before our eyes, to a treatment of perspective which has become inadequate.

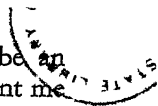
It so happens that, ever since my début in literature – which dates back, alas, at least a quarter of a century – I have never stopped thinking about this problem of “perspective,” and seeking its solution or its solutions. The more responsive I became to the reality of modern life, the more I felt that I wanted to interpret it without having to resort to an out-of-date procedure which distorted it.

Unquestionably, I cannot flatter myself upon having escaped altogether from the representation of things in terms of the individual, of the individual consciousness ; nor is it in the least desirable that one should. But one can at least try to avoid reducing collective life to the dimensions of the individual and the individual consciousness. One can at least try to make his representation of human affairs convey the social multiplicity in which we are immersed a little less imperfectly.

Although it is only for the past twelve years or so that I have actually been working upon *Men of Good Will*, it is for more than twice as long that I have been preparing for this work of mine by forging my working-implements (just as in a factory the construction of manufacturing machines long precedes the actual output of a particular type of motor-car). There has not been one earlier work of mine, ever since 1905, which has not embodied my pursuit of a means of expressing collective life, such as we see it before our eyes, and the way in which it is associated with individual life.

This implies that, despite any appearances to the contrary, this present work of mine owes nothing to the technique of the film. I laid down the principles of the technique which I am now employing in literature, and experimented in different applications of it, at a time when the cinema was

still feeling its childish way. Similarly, it would be an absurd inversion of the due order of things to confront me with certain experiments which have been made in the literature of various countries. I salute these experiments ; I admire them on occasion, just as I salute and admire certain attempts of the cinema to express the dynamism and the diffusion of the modern world. But I salute them as younger comrades, and with some sense of priority.



As for the essential unity and the trend of this work of mine, I congratulate myself on the fact that they do not present themselves any too clearly at the outset, and I hope that they will only reveal themselves little by little. My experience of the world, and especially of the modern world, has taught me that it is not so transparent as all that. I do not in the least envy those people who claim that they can see it clearly as a whole. Nor am I one of those people who, even before they interrogate the world as it is, know what answer it has to give them. The hand of the cartographer who essays to pin down on paper the graph of the forces of our own time, and at least to sketch some of the lines of destiny of the human race, has every right to tremble a little, and even to go back on his tracks. My own feeling is that nothing is as simple as it may look, and that neither Truth nor Justice walks our streets in any recognisable uniform.

What I should like to do, above all, is to persuade my reader not to be too impatient, not to try to make up his mind too quickly, or to expect things to make up their minds too quickly either. I have no objection to his asking himself sometimes : "What's all this going to lead to ?" - to his feeling momentarily "bewildered" - because I know very well that this will never be due to any gratuitous caprice, any subterfuge, on the part of the author. Does it not happen to all of us, even those of us who have the most faith in the future, to ask ourselves, as we look around us : "What's all this going to lead to ?" and to find the world we live in "very bewildering" ?

I go so far even as to desire that, as he reads my pages, the reader should realise that certain things do not lead anywhere. There are destinies which end nobody knows where, like watercourses in the desert. There are people, endeavours, hopes which are "never heard of again": aeroliths which vanish into dust, or comets out of the orbit of the human firmament – a whole pathos of dispersion, of disappearance, in which life abounds, but which books almost always exclude, bent as they are, in accordance with the old rules, upon beginning and ending the game with the same pack of cards.

I hope, nevertheless, that we shall arrive somewhere. My title promises you that we shall. I am not one of those people who find a bitter gratification in the contemplation of ultimate Incoherence. I am not addicted to the dilettantism of chaos. The world, no doubt, at any given moment of its existence, is anything you like to call it. But it is out of all this aimless dispersion, out of all these zigzagging efforts, out of all this disorderly growth, that the ideal of an epoch ends by disentangling itself. Myriads of human activities are scattered in all directions by the indifferent forces of self-interest, of passion, even of crime and madness; and they proceed to destroy themselves in their clashes or lose themselves in the void – or so it seems.

But, out of all their number, some few of these activities are endowed with a little constancy by the pure in heart, for reasons which certainly seem to respond to the most elementary designs of the Spirit. Then there occur epidemics, transmutations of objective, of valuation, which are hard to explain. Everything comes to pass as though the Whole had chosen to make progress by means of a series of clumsy jolts. In this confusion of wills, there must surely be some "of good will."

Do not ask me to point them out to you in advance, with an infallible finger. I shall do the same as yourself. I shall learn to know them little by little, as I study their actions and the consequences of their actions. I imagine that the "good wills" are more numerous than one thinks or than

they realise themselves. It is another question how often they make mistakes ; how often they let themselves be yoked to the enemy's chariot, or, like a blind horse at the draw-well, to the windlass of a well in which there is no water left.

Men of Good Will ! A benediction from of old set out to winnow them from the crowd and claim their allegiance. May they once more, one of these days, be reassembled by " good tidings " ! May they find a sure means of recognising one another, to the end that this world, of which they are the merit and the salt, may not perish !

BOOK I

*THE SIXTH OF OCTOBER*

# I

## PARIS GOES TO WORK ON A FINE MORNING

THE month of October 1908 has remained famous among meteorologists for its extraordinary beauty. Politicians are more forgetful. Otherwise, they would recall this same month of October with gratitude. For it nearly brought them, six years ahead of time, the World War, with all the emotionalism, the excitement, and the opportunities of all kinds for distinguishing themselves which a world war lavishes upon people of their profession.

The end of September had itself been magnificent. The temperature of the 29th had reached the average of the dog-days. Since then, soft winds from the south-east had blown all the time. The sky preserved its purity; the sun, its strength. Barometrical pressure was maintained in the region of thirty inches.

On the 6th of October, when they got up, the Parisians who rose earliest glued their noses to the window, curious to see whether this incredible autumn was keeping up its record. The day had more of a hint of dawn about it, but it was as mild and promising as yesterday. In the heights of the heavens reigned that powder-grey which belongs to the surest days of summer. The courtyards of houses sang with light; their walls and windows vibrated with it. The common sounds of the city seemed to gain in clarity, as they did in gaiety. In a first-floor back lodging, you might

the murmur of a sunny beach diffused itself, penetrating even the narrowest lanes.

Men, shaving at their windows, were on the point of singing, whistling. Girls, as they combed their hair and powdered their faces, felt in their hearts a rippling of romance.

The streets were full of pedestrians. "I'm not going to take the Underground on a day like this." Even the buses looked jail-like.

Still, it was cooler than yesterday. As they passed the chemists' shops, still shut, people looked at the big enamel thermometers. Barely fifty-two degrees – nearly eleven degrees less than at the same hour yesterday. Hardly anybody wore an overcoat. The workers had started out without their woollen waistcoats under their jackets.

Rather anxiously people looked up at the sky for some hint of a change for the worse, some sign of an early end of this pleasant surplus of summer. But the sky maintained an indecipherable serenity. And besides, Parisians never know how to interrogate it. They did not even notice that the smoke had changed its direction a little since the day before, and that the east-south-east wind had veered sharply towards the north.

Myriads of humanity slid down towards the centre of Paris. Any number of vehicles converged thither too. But other vehicles, almost as numerous – vans, delivery wagons, market carts – moved out towards the periphery, brightened up the suburbs, passed into the outskirts.

The pavements, unwashed by any rain, were covered with a dust fine as ashes. In the cracks of the pavement dried dung, little wisps of straw, had gathered. The least puff of wind stirred this débris. From the river, in shallow water, and from the drains stale odours rose.

People were reading their papers as they walked along; and just at the moment when, as they crossed a gutter, they sniffed a slightly sickening smell, their eyes fell upon an article entitled "The Dirt of Paris":

“ The Seine, stagnant and black, is nothing more than a lake of filth. There is no watering. There is scarcely any sweeping. The basements exhale nameless perfumes, and the main sewerage is working so badly that this ingenious system, overstrained and out of order, puts a premium upon general infection, epidemics, and – must we say so, profoundly feared though its name may be ? – cholera. . . .”

Yes, must one say so ? For some weeks cholera had been raging in Saint Petersburg. The papers had just published news which tried to be reassuring : the number of fresh cases had fallen to 141, that of deaths to 72. It was claimed that the frontiers were closely guarded. But what could the customs officers do against microbes ? This figure, modest though it was, of deaths in Saint Petersburg made up, together with the odours of the Paris sewers, an unpleasant mixture.

Besides, attention had been called to a mysterious epidemic at Rabat, much nearer : plague, or yellow fever. Undoubtedly Morocco was giving us trouble. Some soldier on leave would go and bring back the plague, and it would lose no time in acclimatising itself here, thanks to this truly Moroccan October – unless they countermanded all leave, in Morocco and elsewhere. That business of the German deserters at Casablanca had taken a nasty turn, three days ago.

And here they were telling us this morning that Bulgaria had proclaimed her independence, yesterday, October 5th. And Austria was talking about annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina. “ A historic day,” so the newspaper headlines said. So yesterday, October 5th, we lived through a historic day – on the edge of it, to be sure. This time we were really on the brink of History. Our ill luck was bound to have it, sooner or later, that we should be shoved into the middle of it. But, as a matter of fact, wasn’t Bulgaria independent already ? What was it they taught us at school ? – those far-off memories.

Paris lies gently pushed uphill, on each side of her river. She lies in folds. The multitude flows towards her centre. At early dawn, it is from the slopes and heights of the east that it trickles down most : smock-frocks, working-jackets, velvet-edged suits ; nothing but caps. The older men are gravely reading Jaurès's article. This morning Jaurès is moderate, reasonable, pacifist. He defends the Turks. He deplores the bluntness of the Bulgarians and the Austrians. He is afraid lest the Greeks, the Serbians, and the Italians should follow their example. He exhorts them to keep their heads.

The men of middle age are more interested in the report of the first session of the General Workers' Federation Congress at Marseilles. Jostling their way along, dodging stalls, lamp-posts, and the broad backs of gutter-merchants, they laugh to themselves at the sallies of Citizen Pataud. Those bourgeois will shake in their shoes again.

But the young workmen, the apprentices, the errand-boys ("Wanted : An errand-boy with references from his family") have their heads full of the exploits of the airmen, especially Wright :

"Fine, wasn't it? Just imagine Vrijte taking off with a fellow weighing a hundred and eight kilos and making a couple of turns like that !"

Four days earlier, on Friday, October 2nd, Wright had established the distance record. He had covered 60 kilometres 600 metres, and been in the air for 1 hr. 31 mins. 25 secs., manœuvring around two pylons. Farman had established the speed record. He had attained 52 kilometres 704 metres an hour, manœuvring in the same way. The next day, October 3rd, Wright had succeeded in staying in the air nearly an hour, with a passenger ; and the passenger, Mr. Frantz Reichel, had sent the *Figaro* an account of his impressions, which most of the papers had reproduced, even the militant sheets of the extreme Left.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Reichel's impressions were really thrilling. He described the strange, the exquisite feeling of vertigo which had taken possession of him when he found

himself flying more than ten yards above the ground. He had been surprised to find that, despite the speed of sixty kilometres an hour, he had been able to keep his eyes wide open. Towards the end of his experience Mr. Reichel had been unable to master his emotion. His heart felt like bursting. Tears streamed from his eyes.

The apprentices, the young comrades, decided that Mr. Reichel was chicken-hearted. But they were sure that flying had a limitless future, and that its progress would be startling. Everybody was talking about how abominably crowded Paris was. The scaffoldings of the Underground, which rose up all over the place like fortresses of clay and planks, armed with batteries of cranes, had ended by strangling the streets, blocking all the intersections. Not to speak of the fact that this driving of tunnels was undermining the ground in all directions and threatening Paris with collapse. (That very October 3rd, part of the parade-ground of the Cité barracks had fallen into the Châtelet-Porte d'Orléans Métro under construction, and a mounted policeman's horse had suddenly been swallowed up by the abyss.)

Well, a few months or even a few weeks earlier, in March or even in July 1908, it was still possible to understand that they should go to all this trouble and put people in such danger by making these mole-hills for the Métro; but really, on October 6th, in this autumn when aviation had blossomed like a miraculous fruit, you had to ask yourself whether it was still worth while to swallow up such a lot of money, and even mounted policemen's horses, in these subterranean enterprises, when it was obvious that by 1918, at the latest, a good half of the traffic in the streets of Paris would be carried on by airplanes, flying fifteen or twenty yards high.

In the course of the morning, there occurred something like a rotation in this immense afflux of the periphery towards the centre. By ten o'clock most of the multitude was no longer coming from the east, but from the north-east of the city, and then from the true north. Meanwhile the stream from the south, inconsiderable during the earlier

hours, began to increase. Then the rotation continued from the north towards the north-west and the west. The source of the movement seemed to be displaced, like a cloud driven by the wind, from Montmartre to Batignolles, from Batignolles to Les Ternes. There was the same symmetrical movement in the south, where the main stream, coming at the outset from Javel and Vaugirard, now sought to descend by way of the rue de Rennes and the boulevard Saint-Michel.

Simultaneously the appearance of the crowd changed. So did what it was thinking about. Clerks and civil servants made their appearance, wearing city clothes. The fashion at that time was coats with narrow lapels, slightly rolled, and three buttons. The waistcoat, very high-breasted, might be a fancy one, especially during this fine autumn. Turnover collars were starched, and pretty high. The use of ready-made ties was still widespread. The tie, hanging from the collar-button, always seemed to have fallen to the bottom of the collar. Plenty of butterfly ties and quite a number of Windsor ties were to be seen. Trouser-creases were often absent. A fold at the bottom of the trouser-leg, simulating a turn-up, was regarded as a rather frivolous elegance or a fashion for young men. A bowler hat seemed almost inseparable from correct attire. Felt hats with the brim turned down and the bow of the ribbon at the back, "Clemenceau" felts, very floppy, with a very narrow ribbon, and various other types of felts with broad brims shared the favour of gentlemen less strict about how they looked. But a number of people were still airing their straw hats, either stiff ones or panamas.

This morning the girls and young women on their way to work mostly wore coloured blouses, satin or satinette, and pleated skirts, very long, bell-shaped at the bottom and covering their high boots. Stockings – but you could not see them – were of cotton or lisle. The coolness of this October 6th was beginning to make fox fur ties and jackets put in an appearance.

"Correct" gentlemen, reading their papers in the motor-buses at nine o'clock in the morning, saluted Wright's

exploit with a glance and frowned over the report of the "historic day." Comparative statistics of the Bulgarian and Turkish armies were published. There was talk of friendships, alliances, understandings. It was easy to see that the event divided Europe into two groups, in accordance with a line of cleavage which seven years of diplomacy had determined.

When they turned the page, "correct" gentlemen and thrifty clerks saw before their eyes a distressing headline :

#### PANIC ON THE BOURSE

The bottom had fallen out of Turkish and Serbian funds. Russian bonds registered very sharp declines. There was not one of these correct gentlemen, not one of these thrifty clerks, who was not provided with a modest holding in Turkish bonds and an enormous cataplasm of Russian bonds. As for Bulgarian bonds, which had dropped only three per cent, one might be surprised and pleased that they were standing up so well ; but they did not figure much in account-books.

Young women found the newspaper of October 6th particularly empty. There was next to nothing about love crimes in it. Though Mme Houdaille had heated her chafing-dish and then, disturbed at her cooking, had decided that it was simpler to throw herself out of the window, it seemed difficult to attribute her suicide to the pangs of passion. The story of Fidelina Sevilla and her frauds about an inheritance had not developed as one might have hoped. There was no reason to believe that the mysterious vicar who had rashly entrusted her with large sums had done so because he was in love with the beautiful Peruvian.

PAINTERS AT WORK. WOMAN  
ASLEEP

IN the rue Montmartre, although it was nearly nine o'clock and fines for being late were threatening, several passers-by had stopped outside a shop. The street was alive behind them, grazed them with its movement, beckoned to them, as the current of a stream beckons to the grasses on the bank. But, for the time being, they, too, had taken root.

It must be admitted that the shop was as luring to the eyes as an aquarium. It was lofty. A great sheet of glass separated it from the street. Behind the glass a singular spectacle revealed itself, bathed in abundant light. Three men in white overalls were sitting with their backs to the street. Each one of them had a more or less large surface in front of him, and they were all painting. At the back of the shop three or four other men were similarly employed ; but they were not exhibited for public notice.

Of the three men, the first was brushing in a big design on calico. The one in the middle was executing in gilt an inscription chiselled on a slab of imitation marble. The third was painting a kind of coat of arms on a square of sheet iron.

The work which promised to be the most remarkable was the design on calico. It was divided into two parts. The right-hand section comprised six unequal lines of text. Their position was indicated in charcoal. Two lines were already sketched. The first line was painted, in black :

BUSINESS MAKES ME SICK

The second, in red, but unfinished, began :

I'VE HAD EN

The last four letters :

OUGH

were still devoid of colour.

The left-hand section of the calico was to be occupied by a somewhat complex artistic subject, of which so far one could trace only the outline, sketched in charcoal. A man, almost life-size, appeared to be making eccentric gestures and dancing where he stood, in the frenzied fashion of certain Oriental dancers.

The inscription on imitation marble presented less appearance of mystery. It was already entirely legible :

#### ACCREDITED DEPARTMENT

and the first three letters had already received their gilding.

But in the group of people looking on, nobody knew just what to make of the word "accredited." A young lorry-driver came near thinking that it meant a particularly dangerous kind of cretinism, and that the inscription was intended for the entrance-hall of a madhouse.

As for the coat of arms at which the third painter was working, a little apart from the others, it was for the moment rather obscure. It looked more or less like a Jack of Spades with no head.

Meanwhile, in the shop at the back of the studio, young Wazemmes was grinding colours.

At this same hour, in her apartment on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, Germaine Baader was still asleep. Her bedroom, on the fourth floor, looked out on the Quai. It was, as a matter of fact, the former drawing-room of the apartment ; but Germaine Baader had changed the place. The room intended for a bedroom looked out on a gloomy courtyard. Germaine Baader refused to sleep in it, because of its dreary outlook, and also because of her own hygienic

ideas about air. It is true that her hygienic ideas about air came into conflict with her hygienic ideas about exposure to the sun. For the Quai des Grands-Augustins faces north, whereas the room overlooking the courtyard faced south and was so situated as to get, for three or four hours a day in summer, any sun that might reach it over the roofs.

In any case, Germaine had preferred to turn it into a little dining-room in rustic style. The ugliness of the exterior was masked by curtains of yellow pongee silk, which conveyed an illusion of sunshine at all seasons of the year. Germaine spent very little time in her dining-room – much less than in her bedroom. At her midday meal, when she took it at home, her eyes rested upon a window as smiling as possible. At night the curtains were drawn, and what was outside did not matter.

The former dining-room of the apartment had been turned into the sitting-room, and it communicated with the bedroom. This arrangement enabled the two rooms to be furnished in the same style, which was Louis XVI; and, when necessary, furniture could be exchanged between one room and the other. The setting was almost perfect, except for a divan which Germaine had insisted upon putting in a corner of the sitting-room; but this was covered with a pretty Louis XVI flowered silk, and the cabinet-maker had endowed it with period feet; and the rest of the furniture was authentic, apart from the dressing-table and the bed.

Germaine, for her own comfort and also for purposes of hospitality, wanted a wide bed, and it is rare to find authentic Louis XVI beds much more than three feet wide. The same cabinet-maker had constructed one for Germaine four feet wide. He had made an artistic job of it; and on his side the upholsterer, in his arrangement of the silk curtains which fell from the head of the bed, had deceived the eye in such a way that even a knowledgeable person did not realise the unusual width of the bed at first sight.

The pieces of furniture of which Germaine was proudest were a pair of “wing” arm-chairs which she had picked

up for two hundred francs apiece at a sale at the Hôtel Drouot, and a charming writing-desk, in rosewood and lemon-wood, which she had succeeded in extorting for three hundred francs, after a couple of months of intermittent negotiation and blarney, from a very poor old lady who lived in the rue Guénégaud.

Germaine Baader was sleeping her usual deep sleep. She was not particularly sensitive to the slight annoyance of light, for the darkness in her bedroom was far from complete. The daylight, whose clarity was heightened by the scintillation from the Seine, passed through her badly closed shutters and her double curtains, cast upon the ceiling a broad white band which looked like a shimmer of precious stones, and threw a reflection towards the head of the bed. The girl's face was dimly lit by it. Stray rays slipped in between her lashes, glided over her lids.

Germaine slept with her lips half-parted. The sound of her breathing was fairly loud, and it was complicated by a kind of noise in the roof of her mouth which was not a snore, but reminded one of a snore. Her body was a little twisted. Her legs and her thighs lay almost flat on the bed, with one knee slightly bent ; while the upper part of her body was turned towards the right, and her head, propped on the pillow, leant both on her neck and on her right cheek. Her rounded, plump arms lay outside the sheets. Her right breast was half-crushed against her arm. Her left breast spread out comfortably, with the nipple barely inclining towards the right. Both of them, for that matter, were very lovely, voluptuous in their roundness. The skin of her body was blond, very fine, delicately veined. Her face was fair too, rather full, with features even firmer than her flesh.

Out of all this emerged a composite impression, which sleep made it even more difficult to interpret. You had an idea of a strong-willed person, capable of showing herself stern and hard on occasion. And yet there were signs that she was sentimental, easy-going, that she took life as it came. Her nose was fairly large and slightly arched, but it was rather rounded at the tip ; her mouth was of medium size ;

her hair of a fairness which, if it was not artificial, was at least artificially accentuated.

On the whole, she was rather desirable in form than beautiful in face. But you could not see her expression, which might change everything.

  
 NINE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING  
 AT THE DE SAINT-PAPOULS'  
 AND THE DE CHAMPCENAI'S  


AT this hour the activities of morning were beginning in the homes of the de Champcenaïs and the de Saint-Papouls, but in very different ways.

The de Saint-Papouls lived in the rue Vaneau. They occupied a seven-roomed apartment on the second floor of a house which dated from the eighteenth century. Its ceilings were thirteen feet high. There was period panelling in the dining-room, the large drawing-room, and one of the bedrooms.

The Marquis de Saint-Papoul had turned the small drawing-room into his study. Mme de Saint-Papoul had kept for herself the panelled bedroom, which was the largest. Their two sons shared the second bedroom. Mlle Bernadine, who was the Marquis's sister, occupied the third. The fourth bedroom was that of the daughter, Jeanne. In principle M. de Saint-Papoul shared his wife's room. But he sometimes slept alone in his study, on a comfortable divan flanked by book-shelves.

The living-rooms were spacious. The large drawing-room measured twenty-six feet by sixteen. The study was only eleven feet six by sixteen. The dining-room and the two drawing-rooms looked out on the street. All the bedrooms looked out on the courtyard, and their alignment was at right angles to the living-rooms.

The furniture was highly composite. Some very fine Louis XV and Louis XVI chairs and some smaller pieces of the same period, family heirlooms, were scattered about the large drawing-room and in Madame's bedroom. To them may be added the chandelier in the drawing-room, with eighteen lights, made entirely of old glass fashioned in thick cubes, and two brackets of the same kind.

But the dining-room was one of those Renaissance suites which the leading houses of the faubourg Saint-Antoine brought into fashion about 1885, and of which the common Henri II dining-rooms of a later day were only a democratic vulgarisation. The eighteenth-century panelling had been painted chestnut. A mirror with a carved oak frame was hung upon it. Two magnificent Louis XIII chairs, in an exceptional state of preservation, stood at either side of the window; but in that environment they looked suspect themselves and were far from conveying to the rest of the room any air of authenticity, which never entered your head for a moment.

The hall, which was quite large, but very dark, presented side by side coat-racks which were also Renaissance, a panoply of arms, and Chinese masks, and it was lit by a heavy wrought-iron lantern. M. de Saint-Papoul's study was furnished principally with bookcases and book-shelves, whose mouldings, ornamentation, and carved panels tried to recall Renaissance style too. As for the desk, it must have dated from 1850; it was of heavy Louis XV shape and had bronze chargings on which you could observe, at its four corners, such depressing female figures as are to be seen on the façades of the public buildings and barracks of that time.

At nine o'clock in the morning Mme de Saint-Papoul was not yet up, but she had already been visited by her first housemaid more than once. Half an hour earlier she had eaten her breakfast of thick chocolate and two rolls. It was only since her three children had grown up that Mme. de Saint-Papoul had acquired the habit of lingering in bed. Before that, she used to get up very early and see her sons

off to the Bossuet school and her daughter to Saint-Clothilde's.

Even now, with her head on the pillow, she checked everything that was going on in the house. She had everybody's movements reported to her. "Has Mlle Bernardine been called yet?" "Is Monsieur still in the bathroom?" "Did Étienne [the valet-coachman] remember to wash the carriage, as Monsieur said?" She summoned the cook to dictate the menu. Her children came and kissed her "Good morning" on their way out, unless she had been entertaining the night before and had given orders to her housemaid not to call her.

The elder son, who was attached to the Ministry of Commerce and was also still reading for his law degree, had just gone out. The younger son had taken his school bus, which stopped at the door, at ten to eight. At twenty past eight Jeanne, escorted by the second housemaid, had set out for Sainte-Clothilde's.

Mlle Bernardine, Monsieur's sister, had not yet left her room, and she would not put in an appearance before ten o'clock. When she got out of bed, she had put on an old black dressing-gown, and then, finding it colder than the day before, she had slipped on a short jacket of black plush with sleeves puffed out at the top. She still had on her head a black silk hair-net which she wore for a night-cap, and her costume as a whole presented the completely conventional appearance of a provincial old maid, chilly and dowdy. As she passed her mirror, she stopped and studied her trappings. A surprising gleam of humour shone in her grey eyes, which were fine in their own way, not at all like the eyes of a woman, but like the eyes of a very shrewd man.

Mlle Bernardine sat down in a low arm-chair, took up a book lying on her little table, and opened it at a place marked beforehand by a slip of paper.

"Saint Bruno." She verified it on a calendar. "Tuesday, October 6th. Saint Bruno. That's right. Now, just what did that fellow do?"

On October 6th, 1907 Mlle Bernardine had already read, at about the same hour, the same account of Saint Bruno ; just as she had read it on October 6th, 1906 ; just as she read every October 5th an account of Saint Placidus ; just as she read every October 7th three pages about Saint Sergius, a very obscure personage. But she had forgotten the story of Saint Bruno, or at least pretended she had.

So she read it, with a curiosity which seemed quite fresh, and she interlarded her reading with random reflections :

" Born in Cologne about the year 1030. . . . So he missed all the troubles of the year 1000. . . . Childhood, yes . . . ordained priest . . . rose by his own merits, and despite his extreme modesty, up the scale of ecclesiastical dignities. . . . Up the scale ? Curious way of putting it. . . . In 1080 refused the Archbishopric of Reims. 1080 ? So he was fifty. Just my age. I wouldn't have minded being an archbishop. If I had been born a man, perhaps I should be an archbishop. Monseigneur de Saint-Papoul, well known for his liberal views. . . .

" He retired with six companions to an uninhabited spot near Grenoble, called La Chartreuse, and there founded, in 1084, a monastery, where he led a life of asceticism. . . . Why, I should have thought it was the monastery that gave its name to the place ! . . . Pope Urban II, who had been his pupil, summoned him to Rome in 1089. . . . I must find out whether this Urban II behaved himself, more or less, or was one of those rowdy popes who married their daughters and poisoned their best friends. . . . When one reaches that point ' on the scale,' as they put it, you may expect anything. . . . Bruno agreed to give the Pope the benefit of his advice in the administration of the Church. . . . If the Pope had been up to tricks, I imagine Saint Bruno would have found out and taken himself off. . . . But he refused the dignities which Urban II offered him. . . .

" The man refuses everything. But still, he didn't refuse to be canonised. Was he asked, though ? Of course, of course ; I'm talking like an unbeliever. All that was wanted was a little miracle, an apparition, anything at all.

Silence gives consent. Yes, he was a man who prepared for his canonisation in advance. Why not? Don't all the poets fall over themselves to appeal to posterity?

"In 1094 he retired to the south of Italy, to Calabria, to found a new Chartreuse, situated in the neighbourhood of Squillace. . . . I've never heard of Squillace. It's a funny name. First the wilderness at Grenoble, and now Squillace. What ostentation! Those are the kind of people who take up flying nowadays. It was in this monastery that he died in saintliness, in the year 1101. In saintliness? What does that mean? If it's only a matter of reciting a few prayers and saying a few edifying words, I could die in saintliness myself—so long as I didn't suffer too much. It's all a question of what disease you're dying from."

Mlle Bernardine's room was separated by a partition from the bathroom. From the other side came strange sounds, which did not disturb the old maid, because she was used to them.

M. de Saint-Papoul had been for the past forty minutes in the bathroom, which was very large. It had been installed in the course of the nineteenth century in what had been a bedroom or a linen-room. M. de Saint-Papoul at this moment was naked. He had reached his third series of exercises, or, rather, of the practices to which he devoted himself daily. He inhaled and exhaled violently, with his breath forcing its way through his clenched teeth. He threw his arms up and then let them fall again, slapping his thighs. He made his trunk pivot on his hips. He walked on tiptoe. He touched the end of his right big toe with his left hand, and performed a dozen other acrobatics. Some of these exercises he might even do at one and the same time.

Their general object was to preserve the physical strength and suppleness of the master of the house. But they had also a more particular object, which was to combat the sluggishness of his intestines. M. de Saint-Papoul had perhaps made a mistake in concentrating his attention early upon this commonplace infirmity. At the outset he had tried all kinds of drugs: powders, capsules, pills, salts,

elixirs. He only made himself worse. Then he took to dieting. Every successive diet, by taking the system by surprise, yielded results for a time. But the organism soon detected the trick which had been played upon it, and returned to its easy-going ways. Things got better only during the short periods of the year when M. de Saint-Papoul led a life quite different from his ordinary life, in particular when he went shooting at dawn in his own coverts in Périgord or on the estates of his friends.

His observation of this, together with what he read and the advice he was given, led him to believe that he would find a remedy in physical exercises. He had schooled himself to several methods successively. He had taken lessons. Then, guided by his experience or by the series of chances which he called by this name, he had constructed a programme personal to himself. But this programme had ended by becoming extremely complicated and taking up a great deal of time. On the other hand, M. de Saint-Papoul did get results.

He realised quite well that the efficacy of his method probably depended less upon the exercises themselves than upon the minute regularity of the ritual. But if our bodies, which are probably bored, need to be taken in by a ceremonial whose lavishness flatters them and whose fixity enchants them ; if they, too, demand their religion or their magic, the best thing we can do is to give them what they want. As for the element of the ridiculous in a man of his quality pursuing such a humble end by such a profusion of means and losing a considerable part of his day by it, M. de Saint-Papoul, who was no fool, was as well aware of it as anybody else ; and sometimes, when he touched his toe with his middle finger for the tenth time, he laughed to himself.

The de Champcenais occupied a six-roomed apartment in a new building in the rue Mozart. The rooms were not very large. The ceilings were barely ten feet high. But there were two bathrooms, besides a lavatory ; and there were a passenger lift and a service lift in the building.

The whole apartment, except for one room, was furnished according to modern taste. Mme de Champcenais had made a trip to Nancy to order furniture there for a dining-room, a study, a boudoir, and two bedrooms in "modernistic" style. When it came to deciding for the drawing-room, her courage had failed her. On her return to Paris, she had assembled the elements of a Directoire drawing-room, both because she had a taste for that period and because she thought it the classic style that would make the most tolerable contrast with the languishing curves, the floral graces, and the dying tints with which she had peopled the rest of her apartment. (Louis XV style, although it was closer to "new art," jarred horribly when it was put side by side with it, even in imagination.)

On October 6th, 1908, at nine o'clock in the morning, Mme de Champcenais was in her bedroom, sitting on a hard chair whose badly designed back forced her thighs and chest into a constrained position. By way of consolation, she told herself that the "new art," very much in line in this with the modern spirit, made a constant appeal for effort.

The door leading from the bedroom into the bathroom was open. To her left Mme de Champcenais could see her glass-fronted wardrobe. She had been struck the other day by a disturbing resemblance. If you wiped out the mirror itself in your mind's eye, the two uprights and the pediment of the piece of furniture recalled exactly the entrance to a Métro station. There was the same drooping of the shafts, curved in voluptuous flirtatiousness and threatening to swoon. There were the same corollas, and almost the same scroll. There was lacking only the inscription, in letters twining like woodbine: "*Métropolitain*."

Doubtless all the products of the art of a period recall one another. The most modest wrought-iron window-sill of about 1700 belongs to the same family as the Grand Trianon. And, for modern eyes, why should a Métro entrance have less nobility about it, less title to beauty, than the grating, for example, which serves as entrance to the Jardin de la

Pépinière at Nancy and is admired to-day as a masterpiece ?

This did not prevent Mme de Champcenais, every time she stood before her mirror now, from thinking that she saw herself emerging from the depths of the Métro, and almost smelling the stale air of the underground. It was an obsession which threatened to become really annoying.

Her reflections were not disturbed by the presence of the manicurist or by the feelings which the little instruments gave her as they busied themselves around her nails. For the young person was both silent and skilled. Nevertheless Mme de Champcenais's eyes rested upon the bust of the manicurist, who at this moment was bending over. As the fashion of the time was high collars, with a lace guimpe, it was difficult to cast one's eye down the front of a corsage. But exterior lines told their own story.

"What pretty breasts she must have ! " And Mme de Champcenais asked herself : " I wonder are mine as pretty ? "

She was forced to admit that they were not ; and this idea was painful to her. In the first place, M. de Champcenais had shown by many signs that he was susceptible to an opulent bosom. And, if Mme de Champcenais was no longer in the least in love with her husband, she insisted upon remaining, if not passionately loved, at least desired by him. She told herself, indeed, that fashion, for the past few years, had been tending towards slimness of line, no doubt out of community of aspiration with this " new art " to which the chair and the wardrobe bore witness. Hips and bosom were beginning to disappear.

The struggle against the slender figure, started by some courageous spirits at the end of the last century, had won some decisive successes since the beginning of this one. But this very morning Mme de Champcenais had received a catalogue of the latest winter fashions, through which she had glanced in bed. The adversaries of the slender figure were wrong in crowing over victory. The engravings showed that it was still in favour ; and so long as the slender figure was sought, value would be attached to the salient points which set it off in one place or another.

What one could admit, if one examined the engravings more closely, was that the line as a whole formed a curve much less accentuated than formerly. The small of the back, especially, was much more sloped. The pelvis, instead of being invited to develop, was repressed and elongated. It no longer resembled a big ripe fruit, but the first swelling of the fecundated flower.

The same thing applied to the bosom, though it was allowed more scope. Without favouring voluminous breasts, the fashion of the autumn of 1908 still gave breasts of reasonable dimensions opportunities to display themselves. Still, it compelled them to be disposed of in a rather abnormal way. For it certainly seemed as though it was sought to place the curve of the bosom as low as possible. The line of the neck was very long. All this, evidently, was a question of corset. This led Mme de Champcenais to ask :

"Do you wear a corset, Mademoiselle ?"

"Not exactly – a corselette, rather. No whalebone, or scarcely any."

"What do you hear people saying ? Are they going to abolish corsets, as some people suggest ?"

"Not altogether, I should think."

"I should call it abolishing if there were nothing more than brassières."

"I quite agree. No, I don't think so. How would you get the correct line ?"

"Some people say that it is the body itself that gives the line, if one is well made."

"Pardon me, Madame la Comtesse – if that were true, the fashionable line would have to be the natural line of the body. That does not happen often, you must admit. And anyhow, the body moves about too much, gets into awkward positions. If you did not correct its movement by something more rigid, you could never fit it with clothes worth calling clothes."

Mme de Champcenais did not reply. She was thinking about the secret sources of fashion. It was men who had

willed the corset, like so many other complications and overloadings, because at that moment they had an idea of the woman draped which was as far removed as possible from the woman nude, and excited them just as much. Besides, she hastened to add, it was because the women of that time had any number of children and very little knowledge of hygiene and rapidly became cascades of formless flesh.

But there was nothing to prove that some day men might not want the woman draped to be a constant, transparent reminder of the woman nude. If that day came, who would have the best of it? The young manicurist, with her swelling breasts, or Mme de Champcenais with hers? Oh dear, how tiring it was to think about!

Two rooms away, at his Majorelle desk, M. de Champcenais was talking on the telephone.

"That you, Champcenais? My line wasn't working until this morning, you know."

"Why not?"

"Because of the fire at Gutenberg."

"But you're not on that exchange, are you?"

"No."

"What do you mean, then?"

"One never knows, with the telephone. Anyway, I was cut off. Listen. I've seen S."

"Whom?"

"S. You know."

"Oh, yes. Well?"

"The other fellow has decided to raise the matter in the Chamber as soon as it reassembles, it appears."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. He's made up a case."

"He won't interest anybody."

"Won't he? He'll interest the Treasury. It would mean a new source of revenue - just at the moment when people are afraid of an increase of taxes. We don't carry much weight from the voting point of view."

"And what has S. got to say about it?"

"That we must have a try."

"What ?"

"That's what he says."

"By persuasion ?"

"I don't see what else we can do."

"But isn't the gentleman approachable . . . from that angle ?"

"Haven't much information. We are trying to get some."

"Very well, then, let's wait and see."

"There might be several ways of going about it, according to circumstances. You understand me ?"

"Yes. We must have a talk. This method isn't very convenient."

"When will you be free for lunch ?"

"Just a moment. . . . Day after to-morrow."

"How about half past twelve for an apéritif at Weber's ?"

"Yes, that suits me. *Au revoir*."

  
 SCHOOLMASTER CLANRICARD  
 TELLS THE CHILDREN ABOUT  
 EUROPE'S GREAT DANGER  


CLANRICARD gave a little rap with his ruler on the desk in his class-room. Change of subject. It was three minutes past the hour.

Clanricard looked at his class. He sniffed at it, too. Fifty-four children of the people exhale a smell which is not the warm, almost jolly odour of a stable, but rather the reek of a menagerie of sad, soured, muzzled little animals. The air was renewed only by two transoms placed high up. This morning it was getting too cold for the windows to be opened wide.

None of these poor kids might complain if they were ; but you would see some of them getting a little paler. They were pale enough already. Some of them would draw up their bare knees under their kilted overalls. The boy in the front row, who had such fine, such serious blue eyes, would turn towards the window and, with that little cough of his, which went through your heart, would look outside, not to complain about being exposed to the cold, but as though to excuse himself for being so frail and shivery.

Clanricard asked himself, with an uneasy mind, whether he liked his job. In any case, he was fond of these children. Why was he fond of them ? Because many of them were unhappy. Because they were fond of him, too. Because, without being any better than their elders, they were not

yet incurable ; and their world, the world of children, was not under sentence.

Clanricard was surprised to find how much bitterness, how much discouragement, there was in his reflections. He hesitated to admit it to himself. It was this morning's news that had upset him. He had suddenly realised the likelihood of a catastrophe. He ought to have realised it sooner. The news of to-day was not so much worse than that of yesterday ; and it would not have taken much foresight to know what was going to happen. No doubt ; but that was the way men were made.

This poor class of his ! How idle it would be – would it not ? – to go on with the arithmetic lesson ! The only thing that mattered was to talk about what was happening. Would they understand ? Perhaps they would.

Clanricard knew that, if he took the trouble, he could make his class understand anything – or at least anything essential. He had a hold on his class all the time – even this class, which he had been handling for only five days. He was able to follow its most fugitive reactions without a moment's delay and to act accordingly. If Clanricard thought of something for his class, something that he wanted to pass into his class, to lodge itself at once in these fifty-odd shock-pated little heads, he had only to make an effort of will, and at once words came to him, and such a tone of voice, such a turn of phrase, that any restlessness was stilled and the class visibly thought what he wanted them to think.

What would Sampeyre have to say about it ? What would he advise, that absent master of his, about whom Clanricard was fond of repeating to himself, with a kind of deliberate fanaticism, that he was always right, that he was the living rule ?

Sampeyre was of opinion that you should do your job to the best of your ability. And your job did not consist in discoursing before children about the ideas you liked yourself. Sampeyre did not approve of direct propaganda, which was an insult to the serenity of learning, and, at one

and the same time, an abuse of confidence and a lack of it. He would have you teach only what you were sure about, and, for the rest, let a radiation of ideas – a field of the ideal, so to speak – establish itself around you and influence minds without your saying a word.

But Sampeyre advised this only in general. He did not mean it to apply to certain solemn occasions. . . .

“Children . . .” Clanricard, despite himself, had adopted that tone of voice which made the class attentive and receptive to what they were going to think, which did not come from themselves, but from the man standing up there between the black-board and the window gilded with sunlight.

“Children, I have something to say to you. I don’t know whether your parents will talk about it before you. The other day we were all looking together at the map of Europe – this one. . . .”

He picked it up from a corner of the class-room and hung it on two nails near the black-board, facing the children.

“You remember : here are the Balkans – Bulgaria, Serbia, Turkey, you know. Well, war is probably going to break out down there, between Bulgaria and Turkey. And all the governments in Europe are bound together in such a way, by treaties of alliance, by more or less secret agreements, by promises, that it may very well happen, if war does break out, that it will spread to the whole of Europe. That’s all. I’m not telling you this to frighten you. You’re big boys. But you ought to know. Now I’m going on with the arithmetic lesson.”

That was all Clanricard said. He had spoken in the simplest possible way, without any striving for effect. He had not intended to emphasise anything. These boys were not familiar with his ideas. He had not yet had occasion to let them sense what he thought about peace and war, about governments, about diplomacy, about the handling of human affairs.

But the emotion which had made him speak had been so intense, the little that he said struck a responsive chord

in so many minds, that suddenly the boys saw war darkening the horizon like a terrible cloud, whirling and eddying in wider and wider circles like a stifling smoke. The brilliant battles about which they had been told in other classes, the pictures of victorious generals which they had seen on the covers of penny copy-books, the sounding of trumpets on the fortifications, the intoxication which they had felt when they played at war—all this phantasmagoria had disappeared. Even the very word was new: war. M. Clanricard was the first man who had ever spoken it to them. “The governments.” They saw them, too. They did not like them.

Clanricard felt better. His feelings were relieved, for the moment. He was on the point of jeering at himself.

“A fine step forward! What good is it going to do? I’ve got patience enough; but it’s events that are impatient. Educate the future generation? And suppose everything goes to smash right away?

“I really must go and see Sampeyre at midday. I’ll fix that.”

He drew figures on the black-board. He envied the priest who could say in his place:

“My children, pray God to help us in this great peril.”

THE COMINGS AND GOINGS OF  
MADAME MAILLECOTTIN

IN the rue Compans, Mme Maillecottin was doing her housework. Out of the whole day this was her chief occasion for exerting herself. For she went out very little ; and when she did go out, she walked with such slow steps, interrupted by so many stops, that she set an example of repose to the whole street.

On the other hand, her housework kept her on the go. For two hours she never stopped trotting back and forth in her apartment. She went from one end of it to the other to shake three grains of dust out of the window. She turned the kitchen tap on and off. She emptied dirty water and rinsed the sink ; dirtied it again five minutes later ; cleaned it once more.

To tell the truth, she busied herself without method and wasted a good deal of her time. Twelve years ago, when the family had moved in here, Mme Maillecottin might well have spent a few weeks in getting to know the lay-out of the place, the distribution of the furniture with an eye to distance, settling the proper position of household utensils and so on, calculating how to get from one point to another and in general how to save herself trouble. But long before she had begun to see her way clearly about these preliminary arrangements, in which her husband, her elder son, and her daughter had displayed much more initiative than herself, she had acquired the habit of moving about the apartment and doing certain things mechanically.

By the end of a dozen years her methods of work were beyond hope of improvement.

The apartment, which was on the ground floor, comprised three rooms and a kitchen. Only the dining-room looked out on the street. It was a room eleven and a half feet long by ten and a half feet wide, with a ceiling nine feet high. One of its corners was occupied by an old porcelain stove, set in a recess. But this apparatus was not working any longer, and in front of it had been installed a little round stove, standing on three legs, whose pipe was connected with the chimney near the top of the recess.

The recess and the stylobates were painted chocolate-colour. The wall-paper presented, against a yellowish background, a double motif in sets of five, consisting of a little vase with stylised flowers and a horn of plenty. The sideboard was of oak, in two sections, separated by a shelf with small columns. Its upper doors were of glass. The lower ones were solid, and two musketeers' heads, looking at each other, were carved out in the wood.

A notable feature of them was that the feathers in their hats were carefully imitated. They constituted an excessive projection, and a fragile one, in which Mme Maillecottin's dress caught nearly every day. Once, indeed, she had pulled too hard, and one of the volutes of a feather, one of the prettiest, had been broken. Edmond, Mme Maillecottin's elder son, who was finicky and fond of that sideboard, had cried a lot that evening when he saw the damage. He asked for the fallen fragment. His mother had no idea what had become of it. The whole family devoted itself to looking for it. They knelt down on the floor. They peered under the sideboard. They groped in the dark gap between its two sections with curved sticks and umbrella-handles. But they brought out nothing but big wisps of dust, which it was embarrassing to see, because they seemed to give the lie to Mme Maillecottin's well-known claims to cleanliness. Finally somebody had the idea of ransacking the dust-bin. There, happily, the fragment was found. The elder son stuck it on with glue, after warming the two

ends of the break, according to the directions on the tube.

After that, every time Mme Maillecottin was doing her housework and came to dust the musketeers, in spite of herself she remembered that exciting evening, with all the emotions and the little annoyances which it had meant for her. But she was not one of those women who, to make life simpler, would rather have a plain wood sideboard. It was better to take a little trouble and live surrounded by beautiful things.

Beautiful things, of course, were fragile. Those who hadn't them could not understand what precautions one had to take to preserve them. When one saw vases, for example, going back to long before the war of 1870, and others older still, heirlooms, which belonged to old women of the neighbourhood, without a crack or a chip on them, young people did not realise how painstaking their owners had been. But when one was Mme Maillecottin's age, one appreciated these things better.

As she dusted the chairs, whose backs comprised one row of whirligigs and one row of little columns, she noticed once more that the cane seats of two of them were split. Edmond, her elder son, had not noticed it yet ; and perhaps it would be better if she said nothing to him about it. At the moment the re-caning of a chair cost one franc fifty, rock-bottom price.

Just as she was going to dust the sewing-machine (which, together with the table - square with rounded corners - the six chairs, and a bird-cage on a little rattan table, completed the furniture of the dining-room), it occurred to her that it was getting late, and that the beds were not made yet. The two bedrooms, like the kitchen, looked out on the courtyard. The large one was occupied by the father and mother and by Isabelle. Her parents' bed stood at the right of the window. The head of the bed, although it was only four feet wide, took up the whole of the wall space, and the window could not be opened wider than at right angles. It was an old mahogany bed, which would certainly have harboured bugs but for the impeccable cleanliness of

the apartment. (One finds wisps of dust under sideboards even in the best-run homes.)

Opposite the window, and to the right of the door, the room formed a recess, so well adapted to the needs of the Maillecottin family that it might have been made specially for them. It was partly the existence of this recess which had decided the Maillecottins to take the apartment, twelve years earlier. Into it there had been no difficulty about fitting Isabelle's bed – first her cot, then a grown-up person's bed, three feet wide, of iron and brass. The uprights and the bars of the bed were of iron, varnished black. A row of brass washers separated the bars half-way up. Also of brass were the four balls which terminated the uprights, and four mouldings which adorned the feet, just above the castors.

Isabelle, who was very proud of her bed, made herself responsible for polishing its brass on Sunday mornings. Indeed, the girl had everything she wanted in this recess to make her feel at home. Her brother Edmond had fixed up for her two big flowered cretonne curtains, which slid on a rod and cut off the recess from floor to ceiling. So it was a regular alcove, almost a room by itself.

Between the curtain and the head of the bed Isabelle had room for a little table, where she could put all sorts of things. She adorned it with an opalescent blue vase, in which she had flowers at the right time of year. At the foot of the bed was a chair; and behind the chair, a rack with three hangers. Finally, Edmond had been good enough to install for her one of those oil-lamps of a new type, attached by a swan-neck to a little tank. Once you had it fixed on the wall, it was just like a gas-lamp, or even an electric bracket, if you used your imagination a little.

The other bedroom, which was smaller, belonged to the two boys. For a long time they had slept in the same bed, which gave one more space to move about the room. But when Edmond came to the age of eighteen, he declared that the bed was only just big enough for himself. So they had bought a folding bed for his younger brother.

This folding bed had been a source of many difficulties. Mme Maillecottin could not fold it up by herself. On the other hand, it was too much in the way to remain open all day. So it had to be made before the children went to work. But by whom? Mme Maillecottin did not fancy beginning her housework, properly speaking, until there was nobody around her to interfere with her own ideas and her innumerable comings and goings. She had no intention of shaking sheets and turning mattresses in a jostle of people dressing, washing, and eating. After many discussions and experiments it was at last agreed that before the younger boy went out, Isabelle should help him make his bed, and that in return he should help Isabelle make hers. But Isabelle would not let him touch her sheets, and her brother's assistance was limited to turning her mattress every four or five days.

There remained, therefore, only two beds with which Mme Maillecottin had to concern herself. She spent a good deal of time over them, letting the bed-clothes have a lengthy airing at the window, and she was sorry that the other two beds did not have the advantage of the same attention.

So far as shopping was concerned, she had allowed an extremely confused system to become established. In principle it was she who looked after it. But in fact she had little or nothing to do with it. In the morning, for example, she would remind her husband to bring back a litre of petrol and a litre of oil with him at noon. Isabelle was asked to think of sugar and coffee. Or in the evening, when the younger son came home, she would send him out again to do a round of shopping.

He was ready enough to do it, for most of the shops were situated on the Place des Fêtes, and the Place des Fêtes, at the end of summer days, as well as under the lights of winter, is one of the pleasantest places one could wish to see. There he met old comrades from the school in the rue du Pré; but he wasted only a few minutes with them. He came back loaded with potatoes, charcoal, a basket with six bottles of wine.

As for purchases which could be made neither too far in advance nor at the last moment, such as meat, for example, Mme Maillecottin resorted to divers expedients. She shouted out of the window to any idling boy whom she knew by sight, and sent him to the butcher's, with orders which were sometimes obscure :

"Tell him that it's for me, and that I want the same thing as the day before yesterday, only leaner. Here are two francs."

Sometimes the boy, or the butcher, had a lapse of memory and acted according to his own discretion. But Mme Maillecottin was not the kind of woman to mind mistakes of this kind. Any piece of meat is always eatable. The butcher did not go so far as to send her offal or cat's-meat. Sometimes, however, when she had waited until half-past eleven before thinking about providing, and said to herself that there was just time to broil a beefsteak, she saw a tray arriving with a piece of meat for stewing, which called for six hours' slow cooking.

As for the probity of her young messengers, Mme Maillecottin had never had any complaints to make. To these boys the idea of stealing a few coppers from a woman of respectable age, well known in the neighbourhood, who did you the honour of believing you capable of carrying out a difficult commission, would have been even more shocking to their sense of self-respect than to their sense of honesty. They were more likely to forget how much change they had been given. But such forgetfulness did not matter. They had only to turn their pockets inside out. All the money to be found there certainly belonged to Mme Maillecottin, for they had none of their own. Out of it he took a copper, which she gave the boy as a tip. He promptly made his way to the Place des Fêtes and transformed his reward into acid-drops.



JULIETTE EZZELIN IS  
DISPIRITED  
JEAN JERPHANION IS  
INSPIRITED



JULIETTE EZZELIN closed her door. She heard first one lock clicking, and then another, as though it were all something that happened long ago. Every time she left her little apartment, it seemed to her that she would never come back to it.

The staircase was before her. She went down it. There is in a staircase descending before you an element of dizziness, a promise. Alas ! three flights only. The abyss did not go down far.

Juliette had a little parcel under her arm. The concierge's wife watched her as she went out. How pale the young lady on the third floor was ! And what sad eyes she had — and only two months married !

Nine o'clock. Juliette suddenly found herself outside, and she was surprised. How had she got ready so quickly ? And the apartment was all in order. If " he " happened to come back before her, he would have no untidiness to complain about. She must have gone about her housework without noticing it, with that skill, that swiftness, which she had always had, but which now came into operation only from time to time, like something mechanical, in the midst of complete absent-mindedness.

Here she was in the cool, though sunny, street, as early

a passer-by as though she had something to do. But she had nothing to do. She felt the parcel under her arm. It was true that there she had an objective which she had given herself. But she was not so sure about it now. She knew very well that the haste which had suddenly possessed her was something that she could not explain to anybody.

People passed by, walking straight ahead with marvellous self-assurance. They did not seem to have a moment's doubt about what they had to do. The motor-buses going past were full of faces not exactly cheerful, or even contented, but – how should one put it? – justified. Yes, they all had a justification of themselves ready to hand. What are you doing here, at this time of day? They had an answer to that question.

Juliette experienced the extremely subtle intoxication of melancholy. It is something that carries you away, like the intoxication of happiness, but only to a shipwreck bitter as ashes, and as meaningless. It, too, takes you out of yourself, but only to make you feel vague as a phantom, detached, lost. Lost, lost! Once you have uttered that word: "lost," it takes possession of you, wraps itself around you, and carries you off. It is made up of grey mist, of icy giddiness, of loneliness.

A Métro entrance. Juliette did not like the Underground; she had an almost nervous horror of it. But to-day everything inimical had power over her. All these things that looked at her so cruelly had doubtless made their own arrangements about her fate.

This October morning was of infinite beauty. Even this was not spared her – that she should perceive the happiness which she might have felt. The pit of the Métro touched her with its foul breath. There was really no reason why she should go down the steps; but this was a vague promise too, just a tiny chance of the abyss.

Jean Jerphanion watched the mountains growing smaller. This country-side did not attract him. He would not have been particularly proud to have been born there. Still, it

was a landscape not altogether unlike his own. In the form of its villages, in the assemblage of its crops, in the undulations of its soil, certain resemblances might have touched him. Perhaps he was annoyed to find reminders of something dear to him in views which he regarded as second-rate.

He looked at his bag, which was on the rack opposite him, bursting in all directions. It was a poor man's bag : beige linen on a cardboard framework, with poor leather strengthening the corners, and awkward handles, stupidly far apart.

"After all," he said, almost merrily, "I am a poor man ; and a peasant in my poverty. Why should my bag deny it ?"

Apart from all his other reasons for being excited, Jerphanion had had no sleep worth mentioning. Last night, at Saint-Étienne, he had not had the strength of mind to go to bed early. He had gone to a café. He had wandered about the streets. He had breathed in the shadows in the Place de la République as though they belonged to a famous city. The chill of the mountains, a light mist, had fallen. The streets were empty.

When he went back to his hotel, about midnight, he had lain down on a bed made doleful by commercial travellers. He had not succeeded in falling asleep. He had not even tried. He watched innumerable thoughts defiling before him. It seemed to him that, during those few hours, all the questions in life, everything in the universe, all the probabilities of the future, sent him delegations pell-mell. He made no attempt to think. He was like a passer-by who had stopped on the principal bridge of an immense city. The crowd flowed past him.

At five o'clock he got up. He felt the keenest kind of sprightliness. As he was usually a heavy sleeper, his head was buzzing a little from lack of sleep, and there was a slight sense of pressure at the back of his eyes. But his extraordinary clarity of mind pleased him so much, gave him such a feeling of strength, of resourcefulness, that he

was led to say to himself: "I'm going to try this system now - doing without sleep. I sleep too much. And as I dream a lot, no doubt my mind keeps too many of its possibilities for sleep, for the adventures that happen to it while I am asleep."

At six o'clock he was on the station platform, alone but for a gang labourer and a few gas-lamps. He was very early for the train, but not very impatient. He felt capable of waiting much longer without being in the least bored. Then the day had dawned. Even the station buildings, the signal-cabin, the water-tanks, borrowed from the dawn something of novelty, of audacity. "I must never forget that - to arrange from time to time to see the world at daybreak."

Yet the idea of dawn had just been cruelly spoilt for him - the dawns of a whole year. He thought he could hear the bugle again. He looked down to make sure that he was in civilian clothes.

The train started for Paris at 6.40 instead of 6.38. Those two minutes of delay weighed more heavily on Jerphanion than all the rest of his wait.

Jean strode along the corridor of the coach. He considered his own physique. He passed judgment on himself. He was fairly tall. He had no kind of deformity. But he felt that he did not naturally adopt easy attitudes. His movements, as he observed them from inside himself, did not please him.

"I'm not graceful. I'm a peasant's son. Even if I weren't, 'provincial' is a word that means something. Oh well, I'll think about that later, when the question comes up. It isn't very important. My head? What about my head? Sometimes, in front of a glass, in certain lights, I'm inclined to have a very good opinion of it; but then a doubt always strikes me. Bashfulness? Critical spirit? Too much regard for other people's opinions? In any case, I'm not silly. What's the colour of my eyes? Black? No, not quite. Brown - dark oak. Can you have fine eyes in that shade?"

He went and sat down and looked at his bag again.

"Everything I possess is inside there." He smiled. "I am one of those who have nothing to lose."

Never had he had such a lengthy vista of the future before him. Never, too, had he felt so free – or so, at least, he thought. A man of twenty-two is already capable of doing an injustice to his past.

Still, he was on his way to something quite definite. He ought to feel that his destiny, at the outset scattered and trickling in all directions, like a stream in a mountain meadow, was gradually flowing together and becoming canalised. What awaited him in Paris was his future profession, the beginning of a career from which he would have little chance of escaping afterwards, and which was not usually regarded as prolific in surprises.

"I wonder whether I forgot my brush."

It was a clothes-brush that he was fond of, God knows why – one of four or five objects which were dear to him, and without which he would feel unhappy.

"A childish sentiment – I know that. Three-quarters of all sentiments are childish ; and so are three-quarters of the rest."

He resisted the temptation to ransack his bag. Then he realised that this resistance on one particular point, if he persisted in it, would prevent him from enjoying anything else as he should. Jean had no perverse taste for discipline, and he distrusted certain alleged victories over oneself, when something "isn't worth while." He got up. He opened his bag. The brush was there. He stroked it with his eyes, as you might stroke with your hand a docile little animal which hasn't stirred from the basket where you put it. He gave an indulgent, tender thought to some other objects, no less humble, no less faithful. He remembered certain nights of despair in barracks, when the contents of his "private box" had seemed the only thing left that made life worth living.

"To defend it" – it contained, in particular, a book very dear to him, and a note-book – "I believe I would have

laid down my life for it." He thought of animals – of the poor love of animals for the one thing they possess : a hole, a heap of straw, a rag in the corner of the kitchen. He reflected that this idea took you a long way, that it raised questions. " Perhaps when I get there, I shall need to open my box sometimes, just to have something to hold on to."

No, he was wrong. His thoughts straightened and shook off the caresses of melancholy. Jean had emerged from a trying period. His new life would be pleasant and spacious. Until the next trying time came? But that was surely a long way off. When misfortunes are very far away in the distance, it seems like infinity, and the thermometer of anxiety registers zero.

How fine it was, a station shaking like that ! " In three, and five makes eight – eight hours and a half, say nine hours at the most, I shall already have been, for several minutes, a Parisian."

  
 QUINETTE THE BOOKBINDER  


JULIETTE EZZELIN remembered a street whose exact position she could not locate. When she reached the Avenue de Suffren station, it struck her that the street must be hidden somewhere about here, and she got out.

She generally had a good memory for places, which came to life as soon as she was on the spot, and enabled her to find her way with subconscious certainty.

She recognised the surroundings of the station well enough, but there was nothing that linked itself with the vision which had guided her: a greenish-coloured shop, in an out-of-the-way street, with tall grey houses with flat fronts; a shop with a few books, in various bindings, in the window.

It was there that her father had brought her one day when she was a child. A pleasant memory. She had thought of that greenish shop when the idea had struck her this morning to have the book bound which she was carrying under her arm.

After wandering round the various squares which presented themselves to her, awaiting some signal from her memory, she ended by going into a stationer's shop and asking whether they knew a bookbinder's in the neighbourhood. There was one in a near-by street to which they directed her.

It was evidently neither the street nor the shop of her memory. But Juliette was too bewildered to persist in her

search. Besides, it was memory that had led her at the beginning ; now it was chance. When a certain intoxication of despair possesses you, anything is preferable to making up your mind for yourself.

On one side of this street, too, were tall grey houses with flat fronts. But did one not find them almost everywhere in the outskirts of Paris ? On the other side was a row of older and lower houses. On the ground floor of one of them, which was only two storeys high, was the shop to which the stationer had directed her. Just as, making your way along the paths of a cemetery where you have just buried someone dear to you, you notice nevertheless that there are pretty flowers in a vase on a grave, so Juliette saw, through a veil, that the front of the little house was painted yellow, and that the shop was prepossessing and attractive.

She went in. There was nobody to be seen. In the place where the counter stands in an ordinary shop was a long table, with a few books upon it and some strips of leather. When she had opened the door, a bell had rung.

A man appeared. He had the air of a gentleman, and much more, despite certain details of his clothes, that of a local doctor or an architect than of a workman. He wore a black beard, long and full, carefully trimmed. His forehead was high, with that definite, fine-skinned baldness which strikes you as distinguished and the mark of a student.

“ What can I do for you, mademoiselle ? ”

His voice exactly suited his face. It was the voice of a man of good education, without a trace of suburban accent ; just a little business-like ; well modulated, but formal. He waited, without hurrying her, looking at Juliette with a polite smile. He had black eyes, deep-set and rather small.

Juliette untied the parcel she had carried under her arm. A piece of white paper ; a piece of silk paper ; a book in a yellow cover. The bookbinder noticed a wedding-ring on Juliette's finger. He looked at her suddenly with more attentive eyes. Her head was bent over her parcel.

"It's a book I value a great deal," she said.

He read the title :

"*Selected Poems*, by Paul Verlaine. Oh, so you are fond of poetry, madame ? "

She did not reply. She was looking in the corner of the room, at a little table, with books taken apart, cut in pieces, which must have been reduced to this condition for binding. She spoke almost anxiously :

"It doesn't ever happen, in the course of work, that a book is damaged, spoilt - by accident ? "

"Certainly not, madame. In any case, I am responsible——"

"I asked because - I value this copy so much. I wanted to be sure——"

"Have no fear, madame. What kind of binding would you like ? Have you made up your mind ? "

She felt suddenly very ill at ease in the presence of this too distinguished bookbinder. If she had dared, she would have picked up her book and gone out. The veil which had hung between her and things since morning dissolved. She saw clearly the shop, the leather thongs on the two tables, which looked like vestiges of torture ; the books pulled to pieces, out of which torn threads were sticking in all directions ; the door at the back of the shop which led to the habits of a life unknown to her.

The bookbinder looked at her out of his deep-set, sharp eyes. Perhaps he realised the feeling of embarrassment which was taking possession of her. He turned his eyes away, and spoke with the most disinterested amiability.

"I can show you several types of binding, and some samples of leather. It would assist me if you would give me some idea of the price you wish to pay."

He lined up on the table half a dozen volumes, which he took out of a little, low bookcase, whose glass front was covered by a green rep curtain.

"How much would this cost ? "

"Something like this ? Without any ornamentation ? Isn't it a little severe for poetry ? Certainly it's in very good

taste. Wouldn't you like some tooling on the back - a flower like this, for example ? ”

Juliette looked at the little flower, finely tooled in blue and red strokes. It might have appealed to her : but Juliette was thinking of somebody, of somebody whose eyes - which she would never see again - were hard to please. What would he have said ? Would he not have jeered at the little flower, especially on the back of this book ? She hesitated to answer her own question. If she declined the little flower, she would be surer of not making a mistake.

“ No. Quite plain.”

“ As you like, madame. I can do that for you for - I was going to say eighteen francs, but to do you a service I will make it fifteen. Inside, I shall preserve the cover and the back, of course. And I can give you a better paper than this.”

Juliette almost blushed. She had no desire for any favours on the part of this gentleman with the pointed ears. (For she had just noticed that the tops of the lobes of his ears were very flat, with a scarcely perceptible rim, broken to form a point.

“ And are you in a great hurry for it ? ”

She did not know whether it was better to say yes or no ; to come back as soon as possible or as late as possible.

He went on :

“ I'm really spoiling you altogether. Of course, a pretty woman is always impatient. This is Tuesday - Tuesday, October 6th. Will you come back next Monday, in the evening ? Your book will be ready for you. I don't know whether you realise that this is going to be an exceptional job ” - he laughed - “ or rather a horrible piece of favouritism. Look ! ” - he pointed to the dissected books on the little table - “ Those volumes belong to a good customer of mine who has been waiting the last three months for them. . . . What name and address, if you please ? ”

Juliette felt uneasy again. For nothing in the world would she entrust her name and address to this man. Still,

she was leaving the book with him. Might he not revenge himself by refusing to give it back? He could pretend not to recognise her. She stammered :

“I’ll come and get it myself.”

He smiled.

“Very well, madame. I shall not forget your face, you may be sure.”

He bowed with some affectation.

Juliette hurried away.

“I said that I would go back. And I must go back. How am I going to do it?”

WAZEMMES THE APPRENTICE

IN the rue Montmartre, in front of the shop of the painters, the same group was still standing. The people in it had changed, one by one ; but the group itself had not changed. In addition to its dimensions and its form, it had preserved also its turn of mind, which was complex, but in which a few main feelings were dominant : an admiration for virtuosity, a taste for seeing something happening, an itch to solve riddles.

It knew more. Revelations had been made to it, little by little.

Under the first two lines :

BUSINESS MAKES ME SICK  
I'VE HAD ENOUGH

It could now read, written in charcoal :

I'M SELLING OFF ALL MY STOCK

The " I " was already painted black.

It was also to be observed that this third line, which was of unexpected length, corresponded with a re-entrance of the design on the left-hand side. " I'm selling " tucked itself in under the arm of the man in the sketch, as though to give him a dig in the side.

The inscription on imitation marble was gilded as far as the " D " ; but its meaning was no clearer than before. The young lorry-driver who took the " Accredited " for a variety of mental defectives had been replaced by a young

milliner's assistant, who suspected them of being a special kind of corpses. The inscription was intended for a church. She mentioned the chapel where there were services for the accredited. In what way did the accredited differ from other dead people? That was another matter. Perhaps because, while they were alive, they had belonged to a sect or a brotherhood. Or it might be because their bodies had undergone a special treatment, midway between embalming and cremation – perhaps, some preparation in which crystals were used.

On the other side of the big window, Péclet, as he filled the “S” of “Selling” in with black, with a delicate gliding of his little finger over the calico parallel to the movement of the brush – a glide whose careless elegance he accentuated for the benefit of the spectators – was asking himself how he should set about the execution of the artistic subject. The details of the composition were already fixed in his mind. It was a piece of inventiveness that he relished; and this afternoon's idlers had no idea of the surprise that awaited them.

But the problem of colours remained. The boss's instructions were positive: three colours only, including black; and white in addition. The lettering had been devised on this basis. Of course, a painter as clever as Péclet could constitute out of three colours, of which one was black, and white in addition, a very varied range of tones. But the boss was opposed to mixtures on a job like this. He maintained, not without reason, that it meant nothing but a waste of time, because the painter, instead of laying on flat tints in perfect peace of mind, spread himself in a search for shadings, yielded to the temptation of skilful tonings down, of subtle transitions of tone, until, seized with artistic vertigo, he no longer knew where to stop on the dangerous slope towards perfection. He added that, far from assuring the satisfaction of the customer, this excess of zeal was more likely to make difficulties. If you promised a gentleman three colours and served them up to him crude, he had absolutely nothing to say. But if you offered him

mixtures, he wanted to play the artist himself and raised objections : " Don't you think the cheeks are rather yellow?" or " The white of the eye seems to me rather cold." To hell with the white of the eye !

But where the boss was wrong was in insisting, in his cheeseparating economy, upon using calico of poor quality. The stuff ate up more colour, and it made the hand slower. Not to speak of the fact that the black, for example, despite the coat of priming, succeeded in soaking into the fabric, so that you always felt as though you were painting letters that blurred. This was the more vexatious in that the group of spectators could not be expected to know that the calico wasn't worth a damn and might ask themselves whether Péclet really knew his job.

" Wazemmes ! Haven't you finished ? Wash my brushes for me ! "

" Coming, coming ! " And he came running.

Young Wazemmes, a tall, sturdy fellow, was as far from finishing his colour-grinding as he was advanced in reading a book entitled : *Little Secrets of the Motor-car*. For the last few days, as a matter of fact, Wazemmes had been in doubt about his vocation. He was quite sure that painting did not interest him — above all, this low-grade kind of painting. (If it had been a question of posing lovely models in the nude, and winning medals at the Salon, well, then . . .) Besides, as he possessed a keen and open mind, he had his own ideas about the economic development of the period. He believed in the future of the motor-car and of electricity. But, he did not know why, electricity attracted him the less of the two. Because of its lack of movement, perhaps ; besides, too often it was a matter of abstract quantities. So he had decided to learn something about the motor-car.

But Wazemmes was obliging, both by nature and in the way of business. Just as he found it quite natural to " lie down on the job " when nobody was looking at him, so he had no objection to be of service, so long as he was on duty, to anybody who asked it. Even the boss might give him an order whenever he liked. Wazemmes set about

executing it forthwith ; and if another order came on top of the first, Wazemmes, far from protesting, hastened to obey it, delighted to drop the job he was doing before.

He had noticed that in this way he made himself popular with everybody. His comrades in the workshop, who as a rule had only small services to ask of him, found Wazemmes a perfect apprentice, full of deference towards his elders. The boss, who might have had more complaints to make, was easy-going with him, because he was a man who was always delighted to have his whims satisfied on the spot, and was the readier to forgive remissness about his earlier wishes inasmuch as he no longer felt the spur of them himself



QUINETTE, THE STRANGER,  
AND BLOOD



QUINETTE, alone again, placed the Verlaine on a shelf in the little bookcase and returned to his room behind the shop. He stroked his beard. He asked himself just what impression he had made upon the unknown young lady.

"Did she feel my flow of vitality? Yes, I think so."

Thereupon he devoted his attention to a whole part of his organism. He sought to discern the "pleasant, vivifying current" about which the prospectus spoke. It was true that he felt it but slightly; but feel it he did. It was as though magnetic passes enveloped the region of his pelvis, strayed over his back, his stomach. Quinette reflected that, as a matter of fact, he had never experienced magnetic passes, so that the comparison he was making lacked foundation.

What he felt resembled rather those confused impressions that come to life when you are cold and the heat of a fire begins to penetrate you, especially in that region of the back which is so chilly. He sought to draw other analogies. But he soon found that all comparisons with sensations already known to him erred in one way or another. On the other hand, the very phrase in the prospectus: "Dr. Sanden's electric Herculex diffuses through the weakened parts a pleasant, vivifying current of electricity," said exactly what it meant, and described with remarkable fidelity the subtle sense of well-being experienced by the wearer of the Herculex belt.

Not that the bookbinder was easy to gull. He had always been suspicious of charlatanism. It had required a certain idea, which became fixed little by little, after several months of incubation, to bring Quinette to try this experiment.

Chance had played its part in the adventure. Quinette had been living alone for the past four or five years ; his wife had deserted him. As a result he had arrived fairly rapidly at a state of complete continence. The thing happened without his thinking about it. He had not had to control himself. It had not even occurred to him that there was anything in his manner of living worth thinking about.

But one day, in a parcel of books which a customer had left with him for binding, he came across a work dealing with *Sexual Anomalies*. He looked through it, as a matter of curiosity. He was not ignorant about these questions, but they did not occupy his mind.

Certain passages set him reflecting seriously. He discovered that reputable doctors, solely from the point of view of healthy physical and mental equilibrium, regarded it as scarcely normal that a man of forty should cease to indulge in sexual activity, and, above all, that he should not feel the deprivation of it.

Quinette was seized with anxiety. It was not the idea of anomaly in itself that disturbed him. He had never had any respect for the opinion of the majority or for their manner of life. He would have had no difficulty about accommodating himself to an anomaly which was flattering. But he felt clearly that this one was humiliating.

He spent some weeks, accordingly, in bringing himself to the conclusion that he was a kind of defective, hitherto unconscious of the fact, and that a state of tranquillity which he had accepted as quite normal was a blemish. He hesitated for some time about the category of abnormals in which he should classify himself. Was he impotent or merely frigid ? He inclined towards the latter hypothesis.

At the same time he went over in his mind certain aspects of his conduct which had not struck him before. He realised his own indifference towards women, the

meticulous but detached politeness which he showed towards them.

Happily, so the authorities quoted in the book declared, mere frigidity might be transient. It was due sometimes to being over-driven, to troubles, to having other things on one's mind.

Troubles Quinette had, arising out of the difficulties of his little business and the burden of a rent, already too heavy for him, which his landlord was threatening to increase. But he had, above all, a jealously absorbing passion : that of invention. What was worse, ill luck would have it that he devoted himself for choice to ideas of inventions on the largest scale, which would take a long time to realise, and out of which, no matter how well things went, he was sure he would never make any profit.

For example, he had studied for more than two years, and brought to perfection in its last detail, with all the slowness to which his initial lack of competence condemned him, a project for a railway with a single rail. This project, which suggested acrobatics at first sight, became on the contrary quite rational, and extremely ingenious, when one followed it in the detailed development which its author had given it, and took account of the special conditions of ground and use to which he intended it to apply. But what probability was there that pioneers in new countries would come and buy the plans of Quinette, bookbinder in the Grenelle district of Paris ?

His bookbinding suffered for it. Quinette filched as many hours from his trade as he could without going headlong to ruin. It was not surprising that his sexuality should suffer too.

To find out just where he stood on this latter point, Quinette decided to make an experiment. He went to a house quite near him, in the boulevard de Grenelle, whose outside he had often noticed. But the interior decoration displeased him ; and the preconceived idea of distrust about himself which he carried with him helped to paralyse him in his attempt. He returned from it persuaded that he

must decidedly do something to improve his condition.

He did not dream of consulting doctors. What scared him away from them was less lack of faith in their methods than fear of giving away his secrets to anybody else. In this respect he was as suspicious as he could possibly be. Sometimes he carried his own letters to various distant post-offices, and had letters addressed to him under initials, *poste restante*, to avoid any possibility of tampering with them. In the street he sometimes turned around to see whether he was being followed.

He might have taken the risk of trying one of those specialities extolled by advertisements ; but he was hostile to these drugs which one introduced blindly into one's system. As he read his paper, he noticed repeatedly, on the back page, the advertisements of two brands of " electric belts," which were carrying on a clamorous, competitive publicity at the time : Dr. Sanden's Herculex and Dr. MacLaughlin's Electro-Vigour. He read the announcements closely.

To Quinette, member of the public and an educated man, they rang false. The very personalities of the two doctors seemed to belong to that chimerical kingdom of the popular pharmacopœia, in which there rubbed elbows village priests, gatherers of simples, the good Sisters, guardians of a secret against wetting your bed, and philanthropists bound by a vow which obliged them to insert an advertisement every morning, just as others have a Mass said every day.

But in Quinette the inventor a different feeling awakened : that of confraternity. He could very well see himself, if his researches had turned in that direction, inventing an apparatus capable of diffusing in the lumbar region the effluvia of an artificial springtime. As for daring to laugh at the two doctors, he knew only too well how far an invention of capital importance may wear to profane eyes an aspect of the ridiculous.

After these reflections, and others, he had finally decided to make a trial of Dr. Sanden's Herculex, which had the

advantage of making much more specific promises so far as virility was concerned, whereas the Electro-Vigour, despite its name, confined itself to rather elusive generalities.

As a matter of fact, when he had bought the Herculex (at Sanden Electric Belts, 14 rue Taitbout), Quinette nearly yielded to the desire, natural in an inventor, to take it to pieces. What restrained him was the fear of finding a couple of Belgian sous and sawdust.

For three days now the bookbinder had been wearing his belt. He expected from it not so much the possibility of accomplishing amorous exploits, for which he continued to have little inclination, as the disappearance of a sense of inferiority. Together with all the best authorities, he believed that virile vigour was bound up with vitality in general. He refused to admit that his own vitality was diminished. Perhaps it was not even asleep, but had merely let itself be turned too exclusively towards brain-work. Even at best the Herculex could certainly not be capable of making energy burst forth in an organism which was fundamentally defective ; but it might, by conveying energy to certain organs, make it more manifest than it had been before, and suppress a doubt in the wearer which could not fail to become depressing.

Quinette attached, therefore, a real importance to the impression which he had just made on the young lady. The kind of embarrassment, and even of fright, which had visibly taken possession of her was only to be explained by a radiation of unusual energy emanating from Quinette. Without descending to the sillinesses of the spiritualists, it was not unreasonable to suppose that the vital energy of a person did radiate, and, when it had an increase of liveliness, became felt by other people, to the point of becoming almost unbearable.

For that matter, Quinette was fully conscious of the sensation which had suddenly uplifted him. Only one point intrigued him : whether this sensation had taken possession of him at the very moment when he noticed a wedding-ring on his visitor's finger.

When she left the shop, Juliette continued to follow the street in the direction opposite to that of the station. She discovered, at the end of it, houses that were small and poor, but brightened by the sun ; a whole neighbourhood which she did not know, and through which she made her way in no hurry, looking for a bus.

Her visit to the bookbinder's had rid her of the intoxication of melancholy in which she had been living since the morning. The very uneasiness which she had just felt, her distress at the idea that she would have to go back, had given her a beginning of interest in something else than her own despair.

Perhaps fifty paces farther on, as she glanced up a kind of long passage between two low houses, which ended in an opening, she noticed, against the house on the left, a man, with his head turned a little towards the street, and his shoulders and thighs glued to the wall, as though he were trying to drive himself into the wall, to efface himself in it. She did not dare to stop for a better view of him. She had not been able to distinguish his face or his clothes. He seemed to her to have his hands behind his back. She went on.

Three minutes later Quinette, in the room at the back of his shop, was taking off his Herculex belt, in order to change its position slightly and get rid of a little rubbing of the skin which annoyed him, when he heard the door of the shop open, and then close with such a slam that the bell had scarcely time to ring.

"Who's this idiot coming in like that? He'll break my windows." And Quinette hastened to put his clothes in order. He had a horror of broken windows, as he had of noisy, clumsy people. He put on a severe look.

When he opened the door, he saw in the middle of the shop a man turned towards him, whose face was badly lighted, but whose attitude betrayed his extreme agitation.

"Monsieur," said the man, "I beg your pardon, but you probably have a - kitchen tap, a little basin. I want to wash, as a matter of fact——"

Quinette was no coward, at least in circumstances like this. (He was sometimes afraid of a spider or of a reptile, and he was sometimes scared at night, on his pitch-black staircase.) He was not even easily upset. He kept all his presence of mind as he inspected the man, who was startling enough, and tried to take in the situation.

"Wash? What do you mean - wash?"

"I've dirtied myself. I want to clean up a little."

The man clenched his hands as tightly as possible. They could scarcely be seen at all. As to his clothes, they did not seem soiled. He was wearing a faded bowler hat.

There was nothing in the least menacing about his appearance; he was, on the contrary, beseeching, and apparently unarmed. Quinette made a quarter-circle around him to see him better.

"You would be doing me a very great service," said the other.

His voice trembled with distress.

"This fellow," Quinette thought, "has been doing something he shouldn't." He went over to the street door and put his hand on the latch.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" implored the man.

"What?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. I'm just looking out."

He glanced up and down the street, without opening the door. He wanted to see whether the man was being pursued; whether there was any excitement in the street, people running or searching, the nucleus of a crowd. There was nothing, at least in the immediate neighbourhood. At the windows of the house opposite, there was no sign of curiosity either.

Quinette came back, stroking his fine business-man's beard. The man did not inspire any kind of pity in him. If he had seen police looking for the fugitive in the street, he would have opened the door and called them. But he had an intense desire to know more about this and to hold a man's secret in his hands. Such an adventure had never

happened to him before. It was a long time since he had felt such a zest in living.

He went and opened the door at the back of the shop.

"Come in here."

He let the man pass in front of him.

"A little farther on. There you are. Open the door."

The man hesitated a moment ; then, with the tips of his fingers, as though there were something wrong with his hand, he opened this second door and entered a narrow kitchen. Quinette followed him. The handle of the door was of white porcelain. Quinette noticed on it, on both sides, two little red smears, which were certainly blood.

"There's the sink. There's soap there, and towels to your left."

The man waited, throwing a supplicating glance at Quinette. The bookbinder smiled.

"Well, am I in your way ?"

The other was still distressed ; his hands were still clenched. The light was better than in the shop, and on the material of his coat and trousers were to be seen some brown stains.

"Come on," Quinette resumed, with a hint of derision in his courteous voice, "you must surely understand that I am a man of discretion. Wash yourself in peace. You need it."

And he remained planted at the entrance to the kitchen.

The man made up his mind to turn on the water and seize the soap. There were fearful little movements about all his actions. One would have said that every object he touched was burning.

He washed his hands, and rinsed them several times.

"Don't leave any blood in my sink," said Quinette, in the same tone of voice.

The man glanced at him in an imploring kind of way ; then, seeing a scrubbing-brush, he started soaping the stone of the sink, like a good servant, and pushing the suds carefully towards the drain-pipe. When he had finished, he appeared to be hesitating again.

"Aren't you going on?"

"Couldn't you leave me alone for a moment?" the man begged.

"If I leave him alone, he'll take himself off," thought Quinette. The kitchen opened on a little courtyard.

"Why? Because you want to wash the stains off your clothes too?" He laughed his little dry laugh. "You make me laugh. It's too late for you to take precautions like that with me. . . . I promise you I won't look. Go on. I promise."

The other did not quite know how to get rid of the stains. He pulled out his handkerchief; but he put it back immediately. The handkerchief was already stained with blood.

"Do you want something? A clean rag? But what should I do with it afterwards? . . . Yes, you might keep it and throw it down the first sewer you come to - with your handkerchief, eh?" He smiled. "You mustn't forget your handkerchief."

He took a piece of white cloth off the kitchen rack and handed it to the man, who rolled it into a mop, damped it, soaped it, and started rubbing the stains on his clothes one after the other. When the mop was dirty, he rinsed it in plenty of water.

Quinette, who had at first turned his eyes away, did not keep his promise long. But his curiosity had become calmer. He seemed to be following an interesting, but ordinary, operation. So much so that his presence, instead of weighing upon the other, helped him to recover his equilibrium.

After a few minutes' silence Quinette said in a low, friendly voice, in which there was no longer any mockery:

"Now tell me something about what happened."

The man jumped, and let his mop fall into the sink. Terror streamed from his eyes, his whole face broke into a sweat of panic. His skin turned the colour of dust.

Quinette outdid himself in gentleness and unction.

"I'm not asking you to annoy you. . . . Not at all, not

at all. . . . In any case, it's a question of your telling me, or the evening paper . . . more or less . . ."

The idea of a report in the paper seemed to stab the other painfully enough to make him wince.

"What are you stopping for?"

The man obediently took up his mop and went on with his cleaning.

Quinette continued, in a still lower tone :

"You don't want to talk about it yet. That's quite understandable. Well, tell me, then, what are you going to do? When you leave here, where are you going?"

"I don't know!"

"What, you don't know?"

"No."

"Not the least idea?"

"No." (The "No" was more uncertain.)

"Are you going to hide somewhere?"

The other was silent. Quinette reflected. Then he said :

"Listen. I'm interested in you. I don't want to torment you now. But I want to see you again."

He said : "I want to see you again" with such an air of calm determination that the other let his rag drop out of his hands again. Quinette pressed his advantage.

"This very day. Anywhere you like."

The other's face assumed an expression of stupefied acquiescence ; then he stammered :

"Yes . . . but I don't know where."

"I don't ask you to make it the place where you hide yourself. Not at all. Somewhere near, if you like—or farther away. It's all the same to me."

"I don't know . . . I really can't say . . ."

Quinette's tone was harsher.

"But you can. You must know a quiet little café. . . . After five o'clock, so that it will be dark. Let's say six o'clock. Come, now!"

The man looked around him wildly, seeking some way of escape.

"You had better realise," the bookbinder warned him, "that there can be no question for a moment of your playing a trick on me. You may say to yourself that once you get out of here . . . Yes. . . . But suppose that this evening you don't turn up at the meeting-place, eh? And suppose I insist on finding you again? I have an idea that I could provide a description of you which would not be far wrong, and some other details into the bargain."

The man suddenly looked fierce.

"Don't you look at me like that," said Quinette, "unless you want me to call for help. . . . I have neighbours on both sides."

The other relapsed into his distressed humility. He asked, in a very low voice :

"Do you belong to the police?"

"I? What an idea! I'm a bookbinder. I bind books. You might have seen them in my shop. . . . Police, indeed!"

"This meeting you're talking about—it's not to have me nabbed?"

"What's to prevent me from doing that now?"

"You're alone. You might be afraid."

"Oh, the police are bound to have ways of making sure of a clumsy fellow who falls into their hands. No, that's not my business. Don't be afraid."

"Then why do you want to see me again?"

"Because you interest me, and I want to have a quiet talk with you. It's impossible, just now, isn't it? You're too much upset. Besides, I don't want you to stay here for ever. Have you thought about the risk I'm running? Eh? You owe me a certain amount of gratitude."

The other reflected; then, still in a low voice, he asked :

"Wouldn't you rather have money instead?"

"No, thanks. It's nice of you to suggest it; but no; I'm quite disinterested in this business. That's something that surprises you, isn't it? I'll even say this—I ask nothing but to do you another service. On condition that I don't get myself into trouble, of course."

His voice hardened.

"Come on, hurry up and tell me where you will be at six o'clock!"

The man replied, after a pause :

"You know the rue Saint-Antoine?"

"The street? Not the faubourg?"

"No, the street."

"Yes, of course. Well?"

"You know the pavement on the left-hand side, going towards the Bastille, between – let's say between the rue Malher and the rue de Turenne?"

"Wait a minute – I don't know the neighbourhood as well as all that. . . . Wait a minute. Yes, I know where you mean, more or less."

"It's opposite Saint Paul's Church."

"Yes. I've got it. Anyway, once I have the names of the streets, I can find it. Well?"

"Well, will you be on that pavement from – ten to six, say?"

"Yes."

"Between one street and the other. Walk up and down, if necessary – as though you were out for a stroll."

"Yes."

"About that time, I'll arrange for you to see me. You will only have to follow me."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. A café; or somewhere else. I'll see."

"But are you sure of seeing me, in the crowd?"

"Sooner or later, yes."

"You know it will be dark by that time?"

"I know. But there are plenty of shops. It will be light enough."

"Very well. You say the pavement on the left-hand side between——?"

"– the rue Malher and the rue de Turenne. . . . You have only to remember that it is opposite the church."

"All right."

The man breathed a sigh of resignation. Then he showed a desire to be gone.

"Listen," said Quinette; "I don't think that anybody saw you coming in. But there's no harm in being on the safe side. I'm going to make you up a fair-sized package, in which I'll put something or other. . . . Try to look like a man running errands. Besides - one never knows - in case you should be questioned on the way . . ."

He pulled him into the shop and went on, as he searched about him :

"It might help you to avert suspicion . . . Yes, but I was going to put in some old pieces of cardboard. . . . That won't do. . . . If you should have to open the package, it must look like the real thing. I'm going to make you up a real parcel of old books, damaged books that I have lying about at the back of bookcases. You see what confidence I have in you - because they're worth something, after all. I never thought of that. You will bring them back to me this evening."

"Not likely ! "

"Are you afraid of their being a nuisance ? "

He got together the volumes and made a neat package out of them.

"And what if they are a bit of a nuisance ? Bear in mind that a man carrying a parcel like that has the air of somebody out on business. . . . He doesn't attract attention, on the contrary. It's better for me, too. If I am seen with you this evening, I can pretend afterwards that, though I didn't know you, I had bought some second-hand books from you, which you had picked up in the second-hand shops or at the bookstalls ; and that I intend to bind them and then sell them to customers, or to book-shops. All you have to do is not give me away."

The parcel was wrapped up in fine green wrapping-paper and tied.

"Put that under your arm."

The man took the parcel and started towards the door. He was on the point of extending his free hand to the book-binder, but thought better of it.

"This evening without fail, then," Quinette said to him,

insistently. "Bring the parcel. In the first place, it will help me to recognise you. Besides, it's better from every point of view. . . . Walk out boldly ! "

When the bookbinder had shut the door again, and found himself alone, he had the feeling that his life hitherto had not meant much. It had been nothing but commonplace and boredom. Even his inventions struck him as uninteresting. His railway with a single rail ? Something like the amusement of a prisoner in his cell. There were decidedly better employments for inventive genius, for constructive dreaming. He was only glimpsing them so far, but along a vista rich in dazzling promise.

He went back to the kitchen. Its door was still open. The smears of blood still marked the white porcelain handle.

In the kitchen the first thing he saw, lying on a corner of the table, was the mop which the man had used to clean his clothes. The stuff had turned a dirty grey, slightly reddish, in which there was much more dirt and soap than blood.

With some firewood, newspaper, and chips, Quinette lit a fire in the kitchen stove. When it was burning brightly, he unfolded the rag and threw it in. It burnt slowly and with difficulty, emitting a hiss of steam.

While it was smouldering away, Quinette made a mixture of water and bleaching-liquid in a pot ; then he carefully washed the tap, the sink, the corner of the table where the mop had lain, and the part of the floor which it might have dirtied in its fall.

This job, far from making Quinette impatient, excited him in the highest degree. He treated it as a problem. He sought difficulty and perfection. He imagined the officers of justice coming into the kitchen and making their investigation, with all their methodicalness, all their resources.

What trace might still remain ? He looked at the surface of the furniture and of the floor, sideways, to see whether there were any suspicious reflections. He estimated the

infinitesimal quantity of blood which all these washings and rinsings were likely to have left in a hole in the stone of the sink or in the bristles of the brush. He built up the fire again to burn a rag he had used.

There remained the two smears of blood on the handle of the door. Quinette had left them alone so far. Against the white of the porcelain they made a kind of fascinating, pathetic design. The bookbinder took a clean cloth to wipe them off. Suddenly he changed his mind. He went up to his bedroom, on the first floor, and got a piece of cotton-wool. Then, as the blood had dried and stuck to the porcelain, he moistened the cotton-wool slightly before rubbing it. Next he folded the cotton-wool up so that the tissue which had absorbed the blood was enclosed within it. Finally he stuck it inside an empty match-box, which he proceeded to put at the very back of his cash-drawer.


 S A M P E Y R E
 

“E LEVEN thirty-three.  
Really, I have hardly

time. It can't be helped.”

Clanricard was on the pavement of the rue Sainte-Isaure. He had hurried out of school, gently shaking off his pupils, some of whom were holding on to his hand or clinging to his sleeve. Then it struck him that his visit to Sampeyre would probably prevent him from lunching with his parents, as he generally did. It was true that this family lunch did not appeal to him every day; and he congratulated himself whenever he could get away from it. But he would blame himself if he did not send word to his mother, who would be as anxious about him as when he was ten years old.

He saw one of his little pupils.

“Bastide, here a minute!”

The boy ran up, his eyes shining in advance with the pleasure of doing something out of the ordinary, however trivial it might be. Clanricard scribbled half a dozen words on a page torn out of his note-book.

“Take this straight to 32 boulevard Ornano. Ask for Mme Clanricard. Give her this. Don't be in too much of a hurry, and mind the traffic when you cross the boulevard.”

The boy was already on his way, flushed with pride and gratitude.

Clanricard strode rapidly up the rue Saint-Isaure and the rue du Poteau.

“Sampeyre won't be expecting me, on a day like this,

that isn't a half-holiday. Perhaps he will want me to stay to lunch. I wonder whether I should."

He climbed the rue du Mont-Cenis. He loved this street, whose slope was as steep as a mountain path, and was always associated for him with his ideas of childhood, of roaming at liberty with his little comrades. It was gayer, more exciting than ever, this October morning. Why must the sunny air of Montmartre be poisoned by far-off happenings? And why must the spontaneous life of human society, which, despite all its defects, had so many good moments, be suddenly shot through by these great eruptions of historical destiny?

He passed the rue Caulaincourt, ascended the stone stairs, reached the rue Lamarck, and kept on mounting. Now the street was a village street running between little houses. To the left, in a very old grey, cracked façade, double gates gave a glimpse of gardens. One side stood open; but, to get in, you had to push a little trellised barrier, furnished with a bell which oscillated at the end of a spring. Clanricard pushed the barrier and entered a courtyard with big, uneven paving-stones.

To the left was a wing, attached to the front building at an acute angle, consisting of a ground floor and an upper storey. The glass canopy over the door had some of its panes cracked, and its silver-grey paint was mildewed away. The plaster of the walls was very old. It had acquired that colouring of the old houses on the hill of Montmartre which the eyes of no child of Montmartre can contemplate without his being assailed by all the poems that have gone to the making of his heart – a colouring which contains a little of the sun of the country, a little of the humidity of the provinces, of the shadow of a church, of the wind that has crossed the great plain of the north, of the smoke of Paris, of the reflection of gardens, of the emanation of lawns, lilac, and roses.

It was here that Sampeyre lived. The window of his study was open. If Clanricard advanced a little more to the right, he would see Sampeyre himself sitting at his desk,

or in his arm-chair to the right of the window as you looked out from the inside.

He rang the bell. Sampeyre leant out.

"Hollo! It's you, is it?"

Clanricard was at once responsive to this face and this cordial voice. But Sampeyre had disappeared from the window. He was opening the door.

"Good morning, Clanricard. You've got a holiday, have you?"

"Good morning, Monsieur Sampeyre. No, I haven't. I'm on duty. But I needed to have a little talk with you. I won't disturb you long."

"Don't be silly. You will stay and lunch with me. We'll divide the beefsteak. How long does it take you to go straight from here to the rue Sainte-Isaure?"

"It's eleven forty-five now - I've taken twelve minutes coming up, walking fast——"

"Yes, you're all out of breath. It will take you barely ten minutes to get down, without hurrying. You ought to leave at a quarter to one."

"Yes, that will give me plenty of time."

"It's nice of you to come and surprise me like this. You ought to have done it before. Come into my study. My housekeeper will be back in five minutes at the most. She's gone to the butcher's. The vegetables are cooking already. I had a look at them myself just now. We are not very well situated for a butcher here. I believe she has to go to the rue Lepic. There is one nearer, at the corner of the rue Lamarck and the rue Paul-Féval; but she's quarrelled with him. Anyway, you needn't be afraid; you won't be late."

He laughed. He made Clanricard sit down in the arm-chair and went back to his own seat at the desk.

The room was mainly furnished with books and portraits. A big book-shelf took up most of the back wall. It contained unbound books. Against the wall to the right, as you looked towards the back wall, was a glass-fronted book-case, with twisted columns and a carved pediment, in the

style of the faubourg Saint-Antoine. It held bound books ; in particular, collections of complete works.

To the left was the door by which Clanricard had entered, opening into the hall, and then a long bookcase, no higher than one's chest.

Above this low bookcase was a whole portrait-gallery. Included in it were to be seen Michelet, Hugo, Renan, and other smaller likenesses, among them Vallès, Quinet, Blanqui, and Proudhon. Two photographs showed the Auguste Comte monument in the Place de la Sorbonne, and Rodin's Victor Hugo, at the Palais-Royal. Here and there were some reproductions of Constantin-Meunier.

Opposite, above the polished walnut desk, were two fairly large portraits of Gorki and Tolstoi, surmounted by one of Zola. Lower down were portraits of Jaurès and Anatole France. On either side of the window were Molière and Rabelais. Scattered about were portraits of classical authors, in miniature. On the chimney-piece, between knick-knacks and piles of books, was a very fine bust of a woman, which reminded one of a Gothic saint and whose stone seemed to be old.

Sampeyre wore a medium-length beard, rather full and turning grey. His hair, still thick except at the top of his head, was a confusion of waves, whiter than his beard, at least in places. He had very bright eyes, extremely clear, whose colour you did not notice at first. For reading or working, he used glasses, without a cord, which he took off when he was talking to you, and with which, at the risk of breaking the spring, he amused himself by tapping on the back of his left hand or on the cover of a book. He had rather bushy eyebrows, a nose generously designed, and sound but rather yellow teeth. He looked at you straightforwardly, but not in the least with simplicity. He seemed capable, even, of laughing at you.

But the great thing about Sampeyre was his presence. It may have been disagreeable to some people, or at least have embarrassed them, because, by some mysterious process, it upset certain bitter certitudes which they believed

they had acquired, and made them uneasy about decisive choices which they had made in their lives. But to Clanricard and others it imparted a sense of well-being ; it communicated to them such a state of mind that even anxious questions were surrounded by it with a peaceful radiance.

" You needed to talk to me, you were saying ? Nothing serious, I hope ? "

" Yes – at least, it seems serious to me ; but it's nothing to do with me personally. . . . Can't you guess ? "

Sampeyre looked at Clanricard ; then at the garden and the autumnal shrubs.

" Yes. This morning's news."

" Didn't it – disturb you ? "

Sampeyre hesitated before he answered. Clanricard asked himself whether he had not let himself be upset rather too readily. In particular, had he not been wrong in opening his heart to his pupils as he had done ? He told Sampeyre about it at once. He quoted, briefly, the words he had used. Sampeyre listened.

" Perhaps I ought to have kept that to myself – don't you think ? "

" No. . . . No . . ." replied Sampeyre gently.

Clanricard went on, in a voice that almost trembled :

" I came because I absolutely had to talk to you about all this. I couldn't have waited until to-morrow evening. How do you feel about it, Monsieur Sampeyre ? "

" Oh, I'm much disturbed, much troubled. Not especially since this morning, as a matter of fact – for several days past. I should very much like to have your own reactions, and those of our friends. You're coming to-morrow evening ? "

" Yes, of course."

" I don't want to judge the situation as my nerves dictate ; nor do I want to fall a victim to the fact that, in the long run, one's nerves get jaded. . . . You understand, don't you ? Ah, here's my housekeeper coming back. . . . Just a minute."

He returned almost immediately.

"She had the brilliant idea of buying a piece of meat in advance. . . . So you won't die of starvation. I was just saying that during these last few years they have made us live through more than one considerable alarm. We run the risk of getting used to it, and failing to see what is happening at the very moment when everything goes wrong. On the other hand, I quite realise that people with ideas like mine, like ours, are condemned to a certain degree of optimism, aren't we? If I despaired of everything, as some people pretend to do, I should not be so illogical as to go on living. . . . Well, what about yourself - do you feel that things are going badly?"

"I have an idea that Turkey may feel bound to declare war."

"Even though Bulgaria's declaration of independence really does nothing more than register a situation which already exists?"

"Yes; but it may give the signal for a dismemberment of Turkey. And the Young Turks, on the morrow of their revolution, will not want it to be said, in accordance with the traditional formula, that they have been the enemy's hirelings, or the grave-diggers of the Turkish fatherland."

"It isn't they who make me most anxious."

"Perhaps not. The danger is that somebody may make a start - they or somebody else."

"I don't think it will be they. I believe that at the moment they have too much trouble on their hands internally. But - have you seen what happened in Belgrade?"

"Yes, there were demonstrations in the streets. But they were more or less in favour of Turkey, weren't they, so far as I can make out? That's rather paradoxical."

"The Serbs don't care a damn about Turkey. They didn't shout: 'Long live Turkey!' or even: 'Down with Bulgaria!' They shouted: 'Down with Austria!' to the accompaniment of revolver shots. There's the danger."

Clanricard recalled certain earlier conversations at Sampeyre's during the Wednesday evening discussions of the members of his "group." He was not sure whether he had clearly grasped his master's trend of thought. He asked shyly :

"The danger – for Europe in general ? . . ."

"Certainly."

"But, until now, had you seen it coming from that direction ?"

"No, I confess I hadn't – not particularly. That business in Morocco concerned me more. And that's not finished with, mind you. The trouble about the deserters at Casablanca may die down ; but it's a new symptom. . . . No, I confess I hadn't. That's just what I've been thinking about for the past three or four days – the impression I suddenly had that the danger was taking shape, coming to a head, where I didn't expect it ; the Eastern question seemed such an old merry-go-round.

"Besides, there's another thing, you know. At the same time as I had this impression of danger – which you have yourself, which anybody might have had when he read the paper this morning ; no need to exercise any special gift for that, eh ?" (he broke into a laugh) "– I realised all at once that events were presenting themselves with terrible clarity. In the preceding crises, of course, one could discern the action of certain forces, a drift, a direction, a possible dénouement ; but, in spite of all that, everything had a chaotic air about it, which was reassuring, when you look back on it. Whereas this time – well, after all, I distrust myself a little. When you have followed a profession like mine for more than thirty years, despite yourself you acquire a taste for events which explain themselves, for history which fits into brackets and paragraphs : *primo, secundo*. . . . In fact, I've come to the point where I picture the sources of the present crisis, and the issue to which it is hurrying us, so clearly that I say to myself : ' My dear fellow, you're making a school-text out of it.' . . ."

Somebody knocked at the door. Sampeyre got up.

"Ah! It must be ready. Don't let's waste any time."

They crossed the hall. It was a little passage, lit by the fanlight of the outside door. It was occupied only by clothes-racks, a few prints, and a little stove, whose pipe ran up into the well of the staircase.

They entered the dining-room, furnished with a mahogany credence-sideboard, in Second Empire style, with dishes on it; another mahogany sideboard, in two sections with glass fronts, which Sampeyre had turned into a book-case; a round table; and six chairs with curved backs, of the same wood. There were some old plates on the wall; an oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling, and on the floor a cheap carpet with a vaguely Oriental design.

The housekeeper had set in the middle of the table a little cut of roast beef, and a dish of potatoes *sauté*; at the end of the table were a triangular piece of Brie cheese and a dish of apples.

"The beef will be only just done," said Sampeyre. "As a matter of fact, I like it like that."

"So do I."

"Do you want me any longer, Monsieur Sampeyre?" said the woman.

She was a woman in her sixties, with a tired, care-worn face, quick in her movements, and possessing a tone of voice marked by an old habit of defending herself in advance. She wore a black dress and a grey apron. A big mop of coarse hair, just turning grey, was piled comically on top of her head.

"I don't think so," replied Sampeyre, and then he hesitated — "unless——" He went on very tentatively: "Perhaps Monsieur Clanricard would have some coffee afterwards. . . ."

"But it's made, Monsieur Sampeyre. The coffee-pot is at the side of the stove, keeping warm. You've only to pour it out."

"Very good. Nothing else then, thanks. Off home with you!"

"Should I buy some meat for this evening, now that——"

"No, no. I eat too much meat as it is. Don't bother. *Au revoir*, Madame Schütz."

They started eating.

"As for me," said Clanricard slowly, "I see well enough how the present crisis is to be explained, in part, and where it may lead us. But that impression of chaos which you mentioned just now—I still have it as much as ever. At least, I have an impression of confused appetites; of harassed people in a hurry to do somebody else a bad turn and always afraid of their neighbour's getting ahead of them. And then there are popular passions, blind passions; national fanaticisms, of which obviously some leaders make use to forward their schemes, but——"

"Oh yes, of course you are right. I am not such a fool as to think that the situation has become simplified all at once. But look at it in this way—it's rather like the story of a betrayed husband who, up to a certain point, has had nothing but vague suspicions. One fine day a certain number of indications fit in so well, harmonise so eloquently—the personality of his rival, his wife's hours of absence, the wheedling with which she has plied him——In short, the hypothesis that he is a cuckold takes shape as clearly as Galileo's theory. . . . Put yourself in his place."

"But then," asked Clanricard, who felt like laughing, but did not dare, "your explanation——"

"Oh, it doesn't belong to me. I might say that it came to me of itself. And, once more, I give it to you for what it is worth. We begin with the Turkish revolution and the state of Europe at that time. For Germany and Austria-Hungary the Young Turk revolution has been a great disappointment; because they were associated with the old régime; because, thanks to the somnolence of the Old Turks, they could plan getting a grip on the East in the direction of the Persian Gulf; and because this revolution seemed to them to play the game, more or less, of the so-called liberal powers, France and England, and indirectly

of Russia, given the Triple Entente. You agree so far ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Good. Hence the necessity of getting back at Turkey. You will admit that it is difficult not to feel that Berlin and Vienna are behind Ferdinand of Bulgaria’s bid for glory ? That fellow has a backing.”

“ Certainly.”

“ The declaration of Bulgarian independence, by itself, would not mean very much – a humiliation for the Young Turks, rather than any real damage to them. But it serves as a pretext for Austria-Hungary to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. The thing was foreshadowed several days ago. There was that letter of Francis Joseph’s last week. As a matter of fact, in this morning’s paper – wait a minute, on the third page – from Vienna—— Here we are : ‘ Feelings of anxiety,’ etc. etc. ‘ . . . have not been allayed by the general conviction that very shortly – possibly tomorrow – Austria-Hungary will proclaim, more or less directly, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.’ ”

“ There again, isn’t that merely the registration of an existing state of affairs ? ”

“ Yes, but with quite different consequences. It means Austria definitely established on the Adriatic, and confiscating, without hope of return, an enormous area of Southern Slav territory. For Serbia it means the certainty that these people, whom she regards as her brothers by race – as Serbs themselves – are lost to her for ever. For Russia, protector of Serbia, and of the Southern Slavs in general, it means a defeat for her influence. For the Triple Entente it means the small advantage they gained from the Young Turk revolution offset, and more than offset, by a severe rap on the knuckles.”

“ And so—— ? ”

“ And so . . . you were right to be anxious this morning.”

They had nothing more to say for the moment. Sampeyre had found pleasure in what he had said. He had

been going over these ideas in his own mind for the past few days ; but this was the first time he had expressed them to anybody. Words had come to him without difficulty. His ideas, as he gave them expression, had remained more or less in as good order as they were in his mind. There had been no following side-issues, none of those falsifications into which one suddenly slips because a sentence has to be finished and one's thoughts, carried away by a movement which jostles them together, cease to be clear.

He was the more pleased inasmuch as he had been watching himself in this respect. Since he had retired, a year ago, he had been continually thinking about the ageing of the mind, and the ankylosis of the machinery which the mind employs. He thought that his head often felt rather heavy. Above all, after he had reached well-knit and penetrating conclusions when he was by himself and at his best, he had the feeling, if a moment came unexpectedly when he wanted to communicate them to somebody else, to make them come out of himself, that the channels of his mind suffered from a kind of stoppage or clogging up.

It was true that his " little group " which met on Wednesday evenings had never seemed to notice anything of the kind. The master's decline, if it was not purely imaginary, was not yet perceptible to anybody but himself. But he studied himself with stern severity, and he was grieved by the insufficiency which he found within. Was he to attribute it to age, or to retirement ? His profession, by compelling him to speak for several hours a day to a very wide-awake audience, had kept him in a state of training which had come to an end all at once. Perhaps his regimen of silence, begun suddenly and so belatedly, conduced to clogging of the mind.

In any event, for the moment Sampeyre, profoundly anxious though he was about the European situation, congratulated himself no less profoundly, but in a different region of his consciousness, that the greatest personal misfortune which he had to fear, the diminution of his power of thought, had suddenly ceased to seem imminent to him.

Yes, that was the worst misfortune, the worst affliction. What did his other interests matter by comparison with that? What, even, did other people's interests matter? As he poured out a glass of wine for Clanricard, he said to himself, very quickly and furtively :

"Yes, the worst disaster – war, one thing going to pieces after another . . . yes, it would be terrible. But to witness it with a perfectly clear mind, such as I have to-day . . . Whereas to lose one's clearness of mind——"

He interrupted himself at once :

"It's shocking that even a man like myself, who isn't quite a rotter and whom young people take as their example, should so easily come to reduce the world's danger to a little problem of egoism."

Then he tried to console himself :

"It isn't a crime for one's mind to be anxious about its own fate. The essential thing is to do what one can to meet this world danger. No doubt I can't do very much ; but I am doing what I can. . . ."

He pulled himself up.

"After all, am I really doing all I can ?"

He corked the bottle and put it on the table, asking himself whether there was not some action that he could take against the approaching danger which would be more courageous and more effective than merely talking and thinking about it.

As for Clanricard, he went on feeling, despite everything, that kind of comfort, of mental security, which began for him as soon as he entered Sampeyre's sphere of existence. But this sense of well-being, which as a matter of fact the keenness of his anxiety prevented him from noticing, lasted scarcely longer than half an hour. Clanricard went away with enough gloomy ideas to last him for the rest of the day.

What affected him most was the way in which Sampeyre seemed to accept the coming catastrophe as the issue of a train of events geometrical in their simplicity. Hitherto, when he evoked such dangers, Sampeyre had never failed

to take into account a whole world of seething, contradictory forces, some of which, though they were not exactly intellectual forces, nevertheless let themselves be led or set in the right direction by the light of reason ; and others of which, by their very confusion, their enormity, constituted an obstacle to the arbitrariness of the mighty.

" But surely," he said after a moment, " isn't such a view of affairs as you are now taking precisely one of those conceptions which you keep on telling us rulers and diplomats do wrong to delight in ? . . . "

" Yes, and I have more than once held them up to derision before you, by showing you how artificial, how superficial, they are. ' France wants,' ' Austria is disappointed,' ' Russia feels that . . . ' Yes, when one thinks of the hundred and thirty millions of moujiks, and of the polished gentlemen who declare that ' Russia feels that . . . ' Oh, no, fundamentally I haven't changed my opinion. But I am led to ask myself whether rulers and diplomats are not so placed in human machinery as a whole – you follow me ? – that at certain moments, merely in the course of playing their little specialists' games among themselves, they succeed in setting really big events in motion, out of all proportion to their own unimportant personalities, their own trivial characters. And then everything happens as though, in fact, their absurd conception of History were the correct one.

" I wonder whether we have not gone too far in our reaction against the old-time historians, who associated everything with the marriages of kings, the whims of favourites, the rivalries of ministers. I mean especially from the practical point of view – so far as the struggle which we have to carry on is concerned. ' What counts is the deeper movements of humanity, the emergence of the masses, civilisation obeying its laws of secular development. . . . ' Very fine and pretty, all that kind of thing ; but I have been thinking these last few days about the watchman at the big reservoir up the hill, a couple of hundred yards above my house. He's certainly the most commonplace kind of fellow ; I suppose he makes about five francs

a day. But he is in a position, without consulting anybody, to let loose a variety of catastrophes . . . just what I don't know ; we should have to go into that on the spot : flood, poisoning of half a million Parisians, an epidemic of typhoid.

"And imagine him starting a competition with his colleagues in charge of the Montsouris and Belleville reservoirs . . . to see which could drown or poison the most Parisians ; and imagine that becoming a matter of prestige between them. What I'm trying to make you realise, Clanricard, is this : the importance which their position confers on certain people. It's something we have been too ready to overlook.

"Because we have modified our own philosophical conception of history, we take it for granted that events have come into line. Our modern conception may be justified if we contemplate human history from the point of view of Sirius, or over a period of ten centuries – in other words, when distance obliterates detail – but when it's a question of knowing whether, at this particular moment, Tsar Nicholas is or is not advising the King of Serbia to attack Austria, that's quite a different pair of shoes.

"I'm putting this to you very badly, because it's a relatively new idea to me, and I haven't yet put it into any kind of order. . . . To phrase it differently, people like ourselves, who are democrats to the marrow of our bones, are too ready to believe that democracy is already more or less diffused throughout humanity. It is, so far as all sorts of things are concerned – so far as clothes go, so far as shaking hands goes – but it is not in the case of those decisions, those slippings of the leash, that lead to war. Not anywhere – not even here in France."

"But still, you don't mean to suggest that there is nothing to be done – that we simply have to bow down to all this ?"

"No – no . . ."

"Because that would be the most terrible thing of all. After all, you can't go so far as to say that if the working classes, in all countries, came to an understanding, and the brain-workers did too – those who are close to the people – that wouldn't help towards preventing, or at least delaying,

a European war, can you? There's an enormous force there that must be taken into account. This morning, to keep my courage up, I clung on to the report of the General Workers' Federation congress at Marseilles. If all the trade-union and socialist organisations in Europe started a common agitation to-morrow and threatened an immediate general strike, don't you agree that it would give the governments something to think about?"

Sampeyre was on the point of replying, probably in the negative. (His new idea was still riding him.) But as he raised his head, he saw Clanricard's face, drawn with anxiety.

"Is it for me to take other people's courage away from them? . . . Some day, later on, we can examine the pros and cons in peace of mind. . . . But not now! Those eyes of his, so full of idealism! That gallant heart of his, ready for any kind of devotion! Silence, man of little faith! That's what made you feel your age, not that words did not come to you so readily. Don't you see that whatever was best in yourself you have handed on to these younger men?"

Aloud he said:

"Oho! So 'the union of workers will impose peace on the world,' eh? Don't imagine that I have changed my gospel. But, as a matter of fact, I was just thinking about some arguments that we had here with Laulerque. We weren't always quite fair to him. We found him out of date, romantic. . . . Don't you remember one of his favourite sayings: 'If somebody who knew his own mind had suppressed Bonaparte on the 17th Brumaire, there would never have been any 18th Brumaire'? It sounded like a subterfuge. But still . . . The action of the masses, yes, that's what is going to build the future. But when it's a matter of saving the present, on the spot . . ."

"Individual action?"

"Yes, direct individual action."

"But whose action – and at whose orders? There aren't even any anarchists left."

"That's true. The last of them have joined the police.

... What we can say, to console ourselves, is that if, unluckily, catastrophe comes, it won't last long."

"Do you believe that?"

"Think it over. Jaurès has said so over and over again, and he is right: in the present state of Europe a conflict could not be localised; war would become general almost immediately. We feel that more than ever at this moment. Very well! A general war, with the forces which it would put in the field, the material which it would monopolise, the complete hold-up of normal life which it would involve – how can you expect it to last long? It would burn itself out in a few weeks' blaze, like a fire in a petrol store. It's a question, indeed, whether the enormous military machine would not come to a standstill at the first few turns of its wheels. Have they ever tried it, this modern mobilisation of theirs? It's a conception of theoreticians, the dream of delirious bureaucrats – figures and plans on paper. Nobody has the least idea of what would happen as early as the third day. . . ."

"Still, there was the Russo-Japanese war. . . ."

"There's no comparison. That, after all, was still on the scale of colonial expeditions; and the machine very nearly broke down."

Clanricard's face brightened. Sampeyre was not at all sure what he was putting forward himself; but he, too, felt a need of not giving way to despair. And perhaps something in him imagined, as primitive men do, that certain words can exorcise Fate.

## II

### WAZEMMES'S FIRST ADVENTURE.

#### HOW GERMAINE BAADER AWAKENED, AND WHAT SHE THOUGHT ABOUT

YOUNG Wazemmes walked up the boulevard Denain, which leads to the Nord station. He was a unit in a section of the crowd which was moving steadily in the same direction, towards the entrance to the station, as though it were being sucked in by a ventilator. This common impulse irritated Wazemmes a little and inspired him with the temptation to resist it. Besides, he was early for his train – so early that it was absurd.

He stopped at a news-stand. He looked longingly at the cafés. Then he set off again, cutting his way obliquely through the flow of traffic. He reached the corner of the rue de Dunkerque. Here other streams of traffic mingled with the first. People were coming from several directions. Wazemmes came to a halt.

Suddenly he found himself in a pleasantly bemused state of mind. He was seized by a feeling which took possession of him from time to time – perhaps once every two months. To have the chance of experiencing it, he had to be at a very busy spot, but neither in the neighbourhood where he lived nor too near the place where he worked ; it was as though his family, his boss, and his comrades at the workshop radiated for a certain distance a force which had power to break the spell.

This feeling of his was of the vaguest kind. It consisted, in the first place, in feeling himself at home in the street ; and not merely at home, but more so than usual. Then a sense of excitement grew in him. It seemed to Wazemmes as though, mingling in the crowd in disguise, were beings half real, half imaginary, passing close by him. One might call them lucky chances, though Wazemmes did not like to give them so definite a name.

If he put out his hand at the right moment, he would be able to grasp one of these phantoms of fortune ; or perhaps he need merely let his hand be taken. The idea made him a little giddy. He had to stand still a little longer. Perhaps he would make a beginning by just waiting.

Precisely at this moment a gentleman, coming from the direction of the rue Lafayette, walking fast and as though he had something on his mind, also stopped at the corner of the boulevard Denain. He turned his head from side to side, not looking at anything in particular. His eyes fell by chance on a face which was quite close to him — a face both vacuous and receptive in an extraordinary degree.

" Say, young man, may I ask you to do me a service ? "

" What is it ? "

" You know Paris ? "

" Yes."

" How long do you think it would take you to get to the boulevard Saint-Jacques and back in the Métro ? "

Wazemmes's first thought was to reply : " I'll go for you." But he looked at the station clock. Too bad ! The train for Enghien left in twenty minutes ; and there could be no question of his missing it. That would be a much more serious matter than neglecting a job or playing truant when he was running an errand for his boss. Really, Wazemmes simply could not do it.

He explained his position as best he could to the gentleman, who did not seem to believe him and turned away with a very curt : " Thank you."

Wazemmes felt as hurt as though he had just lost his job. This errand to the boulevard Saint-Jacques could not have

failed to be the beginning of a series of unexpected events. His instinct told him so. He was within an ace of trying to overtake the gentleman. But he was no longer to be seen. The gentleman must have gone down into the Métro himself, taking Wazemmes's chance with him.

Germaine Baader awakened. For the past few minutes she had been merely drowsing, listening to the sound of traffic on the Quai des Grands-Augustins and wondering what time it was. It was sheer laziness that prevented her from opening her eyes.

She opened them. The first thing she saw was the scintillating of jewellery on the ceiling. She groped in the dusk for the movable switch of the electric bell and finally discovered it between her bolster and her pillow. As usual, her action recalled an annoying little thought to her. To think how convenient it would be, just by pressing a button like this, to turn on a light the instant she woke up! But her landlord had refused to have electric light installed in the apartment. The upholsterer, it was true, had recommended Germaine to have two gas brackets, with incandescent mantles and automatic lighting, like those she had in her sitting-room, fixed one on either side of her bed. But she was afraid of being asphyxiated. Gurau himself had dissuaded her from the idea.

Her housemaid came into the room. She was a dark, thin girl, rather pretty.

She opened the shutters and pulled back the curtains. The light streamed in on Germaine, bathing her face and making her blink her eyelids, which were rather dusky and heavy. She had rather large eyes, bright blue, with a marvelously caressing light in them. When they were open, her whole face came to life with the flattery which they diffused, and perhaps abused it.

"Will you have your breakfast at once, madame?"

"Yes - no, wait a minute. What have you made?"

"Chocolate. But if you would like something else, madame . . ."

Germaine was quite perplexed. She was very fond of chocolate, and she was allured in advance by the seductive smell of it. But to-day she had at least two reasons for not taking it. In the first place, she wanted to have a bath before Gurau arrived, and she was sure that it would be imprudent to get into her bath with her stomach loaded with so heavy a drink as chocolate. In the next place, in not much more than an hour she and Gurau would be having lunch. As she would have to eat more than usual, she would be wise to be satisfied with a cup of tea. But her maid had made the mistake of evoking the idea of chocolate, which was a sweet-scented, sensuous idea.

"Bring me just a little in a coffee-cup."

She thought of doing without her bath ; for it was not likely that Gurau, pressed for time as he would be to-day, would take it into his head to be amorous. But, still, you never knew ; and, when Germaine was not sure that her body was clean from top to toe, she could not be amorous without feeling a sense of inferiority.

She sat up in bed. Her rose-coloured nightdress had short sleeves and a low neck. Germaine looked at her arms, which she found shapely and smooth. The track of the veins was apparent, but only in faint blue. As a matter of fact, that contributed towards the beauty of the skin, and it did not seem to be a disquieting sign for the future. Her legs were another matter. Germaine imagined that she would have trouble, later on, in avoiding varicose veins.

Those fine arms of hers did not satisfy her altogether, though. They were covered with too pronounced a down. To be sure, the fairness of the hair made it less visible, and in certain lights, especially, it was not noticeable. But at this moment, as she held her arm in front of her and raised it almost to the level of her eyes, this abundance of fair hair, all lying in the same direction, was distasteful to her.

Then she slid her hand into the neck of her nightdress, felt her breasts, and held them up. She lifted them out and looked at them. One of them, while she was asleep, had been bruised by the folds of her nightdress. There were

two red stripes on it. In one place the skin was rubbed. Germaine was afraid that these marks would not wear away very quickly. She thought of Gurau, who had often complimented her upon the beauty of her breasts, and showed a preference for them in his more sentimental moments.

She reflected upon the feminine body. Although she was a woman herself, she had no difficulty in appreciating that men should find it voluptuous, exciting, in almost all its parts. To press kisses on a woman's shoulder, where they sank in, must be a keen pleasure in itself. And the masculine body? Germaine questioned herself. Did it exercise, over her at least, any similar power of attraction? She loved the firmness of its flesh, its decided lines. In an embrace it was pleasant to her to feel the strength of the muscles which held her. But all this remained a general impression, and not a very keen one. The different parts of the masculine body seemed to her neither beautiful nor stirring by themselves.

As a matter of fact, she did remember a lover whom she had had for a few weeks, a couple of years ago. He had an athlete's shoulders and a torso which thinned away towards his waist. Contemplation of those shoulders delighted Germaine and soon induced intense desire in her. But this was the only case where she had been conscious of a charm of that kind.

She agreed with herself, anyway, that the interest which she took in love was essentially rather selfish. What she loved in a man was less the man himself than the passion or the affection which he showed her. She knew, from the confidences of her friends, that it happened to certain women, in the course of amorous practices, to be seized with an enthusiasm for caresses which was a sensual form of generosity and even of devotion. What intoxicated them then was forgetting themselves and thinking only of the man. It was such women, too, who experienced in the presence of the masculine form, in all its aspects, an emotion which was foreign to Germaine.

Not that Germaine was too reserved a mistress. She

insisted upon regarding herself as a normal woman ; and her opinion was that a normal woman has no reason to refuse anything to the man of her choice, unless he proceeds to quite delirious lengths. To conform to this rule, she did not need to master either shame or disgust ; but her complaisance lacked passion.

She put her empty cup down on the bedside table. She got out of bed. She picked up a kimono of Nagasaki silk, lined with silk too, and wrapped it around her. This kimono, which was a quite recent purchase, still gave her pleasure. Every morning she ran her eyes over its trimming.

While her maid was preparing her bath, Germaine sat down at her dressing-table. She had at hand a bottle of colourless liquid and a little porcelain jar which contained a slightly yellowish cream – both of them without any label. The two products came from a herbalist in the rue Dauphine, who claimed that she made them up herself from secret recipes. (Germaine was delighted to believe that there were such secrets, handed on by a clandestine tradition. On the other hand, she distrusted advertisements and had always refused to try those creams manufactured in bulk which certain leading perfumers and chemists were beginning to popularise.)

The liquid, which was dabbed on with cottonwool, was intended to cleanse and tone up the skin of the face. Germaine used it once at night, when she came back from the theatre. Then she went to bed, with her skin clean and its pores open. When she got up, she repeated this cleansing, to remove any impurities which sleep might have produced. Then she put on a coating of cream and for ten minutes gently massaged the parts of her face which were most threatened with lines. She left this coating of cream on until she got out of her bath. At this point she wiped it off with a fine cloth, without rubbing her face much. A trace of the cream remained until the evening and served as a foundation for powder, though Germaine powdered as little as possible during the day.

This procedure had been recommended to her by the

herbalist. A society woman might go about the matter differently – for example, put on her coating of cream in the evening and leave it on all night. But for an actress, who came home with her face tired and softened by grease-paint, the best thing, after a tonic cleansing, was to allow the face a few hours of complete freedom.

Her care of her face, while it occupied her attention, did not prevent thoughts about other things from occurring to her and following their course.

"Marguerite, you didn't give me the paper. Bring it here, and be quick about it."

Germaine Baader opened it and turned at once to page five, the last column. "Financial News." Flour . . . wheat . . . spirits . . . sugar . . . Oh!

"Dull and twelve centimes lower. Trading inactive. The dullness has been caused by external conditions and the fine weather. Refined sugar fifty centimes lower. Offered at 59.50 to 60 francs."

Her heart beat a little faster. She felt a slight sense of pressure at her temples. She threw the paper aside and went on with her massage. She held twenty thousand kilos of refined sugar, which she had bought at 62.42. Taking yesterday's average at 59.75, she had already lost nearly six hundred francs: forty days of her salary as an actress. And if the fall was due to the fine weather, this magnificent sunshine was not going to improve matters.

She had ventured upon this transaction without mentioning it to Gurau. It was one of her fellow-actresses who had converted her, little by little, to speculation in sugar. It appeared, for that matter, that every second person in Paris was speculating, in raw sugar as well as refined. But the refined had the preference, perhaps because there was some idea that in case of necessity it could be turned to account more easily.

This friend of hers, who had a generous lover and some old savings of her own, held a hundred thousand kilos, which she had bought at various prices, ranging from 58 to 63. She had made a mistake in not selling out in time.

The broker who acted on their behalf had his office in the rue du Bouloi. It consisted of two very small rooms, in which there was not enough sugar to do the honours to a clever dog. The manager, Riccoboni, before taking any new clients, made inquiries, or pretended to make inquiries, about their solvency. But his principal precaution was to demand the payment of a substantial guarantee. For a purchase of about twelve thousand francs, Germaine had had to make a deposit of five thousand, and she had to pay six per cent interest on the remainder, which Riccoboni was supposed to have advanced.

For this was a matter of operations alleged to be for cash. The exploiters of the mania for speculation were afraid, no doubt, that operations on margin would not be understood by the vast profane public at which they aimed. The purchaser must be able to say to himself that his sugar was waiting for him somewhere, in a clean corner of a warehouse, sheltered from the rain. (Just imagine a leak in the roof, right over your twenty thousand kilos ! It was enough to give you the shivers. True, the weather was dry.) Riccoboni had, indeed, remarked that, in addition to his six per cent interest in advance, he would be justified in demanding warehousing expenses. But he was not going to quarrel about trifles like that. Everybody looked forward confidently to a rise to ninety francs, a quotation which Riccoboni predicted for the end of December 1908.

Unfortunately, the rumour ran, and circulated readily among these novices in speculation, with their nerves on edge, that the government was taking a hand, and that, to avoid a giddy rise in prices, which humble consumers would have to pay, it was going to insist that purchasers should actually receive their sugar. Germaine saw herself transporting twenty thousand boxes of a kilo apiece and piling them up in her three-room apartment. The sitting-room would be choked with them. There would be sugar under the bed and in the bathtub.

And how was she going to get rid of it afterwards ? Let her face the worst. Offer it to the grocer at the corner ?

Sell it to her friends? But your friends always deserted you when you needed them. Eat the twenty thousand kilos? Her gorge rose. Even if she lived on nothing but sweet dishes, it would be difficult for a woman living by herself to consume more than a hundred kilos a year. Two hundred years of sugar. . . . At all costs, some day or other, Germaine would have to unburden herself to Gurau about this misadventure.

She decided not to think about it any more. Germaine was by no means of an easy-going disposition. She did not take daily troubles lightly; and she was especially responsive to anxiety about money. But she possessed a mind with a good circulation. Ideas, in her case, never had any tendency to become fixed.

She looked at the other pages of the paper. This Bulgarian business – Germaine was familiar with it. Gurau had no hesitation about talking politics to her. Besides, she was quite at her ease in serious conversation. Not only had she received the complete secondary education of girls at the Fénelon academy, but private tuition had also enabled her to pass the two parts of the classical examination for the bachelor's degree, letters and philosophy.

What surprised her sometimes – for she made a study of herself – was that she should never feel, about questions which she believed she understood as well as Gurau and about which she could give a sensible opinion, the keen interest which he took in them. It was the same to-day. If she knew that the situation was serious, if she perceived the consequences which these Eastern disputes might have for Europe, it was not merely because Gurau had told her so. She could realise it very well on her own account. But she could not get excited about it.

The drop of twelve centimes in refined sugar disturbed her, fundamentally, much more. And if somebody whose opinion was authoritative had told her that her Nagasaki kimono was preposterously badly cut, she would have been frankly desolated. She was not such a fool as to ignore the fact that a European catastrophe would involve

repercussions on a very different scale in everybody's life – in her own life. But so long as a truth remained as generalised as that, Germaine could not give it more than polite attention.

To find any real interest in these Eastern complications, she was driven to telling herself that Gurau's political career might be affected by them. Here was a consequence which it was easy for her to isolate, and which made these remote events become perceptible to her, as though a special nerve transmitted them to her.

If the situation got worse, Gurau would intervene in one way or another, either in the Foreign Affairs Commission to which he belonged or from his seat in the Chamber. The Chambers were not due to assemble until a few days hence ; but the government might summon them as a matter of urgency. It was in such circumstances that ministries were often overthrown.

Gurau was rather young to be a minister. But his name had already come into prominence in the newspapers. It would be very flattering and very advantageous to be the mistress of a minister. Gurau would never desert her ; in the first place, because he was by nature as faithful as any man could be, and, in the next place, because he prided himself upon a certain nicety of mind. From the monetary point of view, he would help her more. She would never have dreamed of speculating in sugar if she were not so hard up.

Of course, a war would be a terrible thing. But there was nothing to prove that France would be involved in it. For that matter, even in war-time a minister's mistress ought to be able to preserve most of the amenities of life. She might even make herself useful – join the Red Cross, for example ; keep up the spirits of the wounded.

Surely there would be no hesitation about decorating with the Legion of Honour a woman who had risked her life under shell-fire ? What an ovation there would be the first time she reappeared in the theatre ! Those rags of papers would not dare to make fun of her then. Anyway, Gurau

as a minister would arrange for her not to be worried any more about her twenty thousand kilos of sugar. He might even have them taken off her hands to meet the needs of the soldiers on active service.

These reflections had carried her as far as her bath, which struck her as frightful ; and so did the whole bathroom, for that matter. It was a makeshift installation in an old store-room. Even the very pipes had something ridiculous about them. The floor must be rotting away under its warped linoleum. As for the bath itself, which had had to be high and short, for lack of room, and was painted an abominable spinach-green on the outside, it reminded you of public bathing-establishments, with baths at seventy-five centimes.

Before she got into the water, Germaine placed her right foot on the edge of the bath. She examined the network of veins in her leg. Behind the knee, at the top of the calf, she could see, under the skin, a little violet accumulation. On the inside of the thigh several blue lines, very fine, but much too clear, converged like the feet of an insect.

Germaine changed the position of her leg, put it on the ground, asked herself whether, with a difference of lighting or point of view, or of pressure on the flesh, she would notice these details. Would anybody who did not know about them beforehand observe them ? Were they more visible than a year ago ? Should she start taking remedies at once ? The herbalist might know of some, rather secret, like her other preparations. The bath-water was almost too hot. What was the best thing in such cases – rather hot water or rather cold water ?



WHEN midday came,  
Quinette left his shop.

He sniffed the air of the street. He studied it like a face in which one expects to surprise some hidden emotion. A few passers-by were walking along the pavements. Quite a number of windows were open, especially on the side of the tall houses, which at this hour of the day had the sun on them. Two or three women were looking out of their windows.

The passers-by certainly seemed to be walking in the ordinary way. And yet their walk, their presence at different distances, conveyed to Quinette an impression almost of mystery. Even the number of them led him to ask himself

a question : “ Aren’t there more of them than on any other day at this hour ? ”

He looked at the row of low houses, on the right-hand side of the street. “ Was it in one of those houses ? ” Then he looked at the tall grey houses opposite. “ It would have been harder for him to get out of them. Besides, you can hear everything. . . . But there are isolated rooms . . . next to a thick wall . . . or over an empty apartment. . . . And then, in certain circumstances, it might have been done quietly. . . . ”

He noticed that he was walking along the street himself in a rather unusual way, with hesitating steps, with his head too often raised and questioning, as though he were in this neighbourhood for the first time and were trying to discover a landmark.

He found himself opposite a little grocer’s shop.

“ I must go in there. I’ll buy something or other . . . a box of matches. I’ll listen to what the people are saying . . . Yes, but suppose they’re talking about *that* – shall I have sufficient self-control not to give myself away ? . . . Haven’t I presence of mind enough as a rule ? I had plenty this morning, when I found him in front of me all at once. . . . Yes, but I might flush or turn pale. . . . If I do, I must enter into the conversation, give my opinion, talk about all the crimes there are, blame the police. I could say : ‘ When you live alone, as I do, it’s alarming ! ’ . . . Surely you have a right to be upset when you hear that there has just been a murder right beside you ? ”

A murder ? Of course. What else could it have been ?

He crossed the street. He went into the grocer’s. There were the proprietor, his assistant, a couple of women customers, and a boy. “ Anything else ? . . . a litre of petrol. . . . ” “ Would you like them in a box or by the pound ? ” . . . “ Maurice, hand me those ninety-five-centime sponges. ”

The bookbinder waited, with his ears pricked up, imagining, after every pause, that somebody would say : “ By the way, did you hear . . . ” His heart was thumping. He was

surprised at it. He even asked himself whether his heart had ever thumped like that before. When he was very angry, perhaps. Quinette, who as a rule was one of the calmest of men, had in the course of his life, at intervals of a few years, been very angry indeed.

Finally his turn came. They gave him his matches. He paled a little when the shopkeeper looked at him as he said : "And what else ? . . ." He had to get out. He went out disappointed, almost humiliated. He said to himself that he was not going to repeat the experiment, that he would go straight home and shut himself up even more completely than usual.

But he had not taken a dozen steps along the pavement before he was seized once more by a burning curiosity. The deed — he avoided calling it "the crime" ; he avoided classifying it and thereby condemning it — the deed had taken place here, in this very locality ; quite close, probably. It was not enough to say that it had taken place. No, it was still there, like something present. Still invisible, perhaps ; hidden at a certain depth. Where was it ? Behind which of these walls ?

But it could not remain hidden for ever. It was bound to come out in the end. Where would it come out from ? On which of these house-fronts would it make its appearance, like a bloody sweat ?

Quinette felt like going into one of these houses and saying to the concierge who was sweeping out the hall : "Madame . . . madame . . . didn't you notice anything out of the way this morning ? . . . No ? Are you sure ? No unusual noises ? Nobody called out ? There doesn't happen to be an old woman in the house who lives alone, in an apartment looking out on the courtyard ? Oh, you saw her coming down this morning, did you ? You didn't hear anybody running past your door ?"

He was opposite a fruit-shop. He could hear voices raised. What were these people talking about ? Was it here that the "deed" had just emerged out of the shadows ?

"What can I buy that doesn't cost much and that you

can stick in your pocket easily? Yes, a couple of sous' worth of mixed herbs."

The first sentence he heard as he entered gave him a shock:

"When I picked him up, he was still breathing."

Quinette had to lean against a big round basket full of vegetables. A few moments earlier he had been equally afraid of flushing and of turning pale. He realised that it was rather turning pale that threatened him. But he was still able to speak. He was quite capable of saying, in an almost natural tone of voice: "Excuse me, but . . ." He still had his presence of mind.

A moment later he was calm - calm and rather disappointed. These people were talking about an injured sparrow, which a good woman had found in a courtyard and which had died almost immediately. They were discussing at length how the sparrow might have been hurt. "A cat on the eaves." "A boy with a sling."

"And all this fuss," Quinette reflected, "because a sparrow has been killed in the neighbourhood! If they only knew! . . ."

He toyed for a moment with the effect which he would create among the company present if he suddenly started telling them calmly what had happened to him that morning. He imagined how they would stare, how they would exclaim. The story of the sparrow would not be worth much. But if this idea excited him, it did not impel him to speak. The secret of which he was full exerted no pressure to break out of him. He had always flattered himself that he was no gabbler. But this little test made him sure of it. Clearly, the necessity of unburdening himself was not one of his weaknesses.

When he had his couple of sous' worth of mixed herbs, he had to retire from the fruit-shop. Where should he go next? The tobacconist's on the corner? He would only have to buy another box of matches.

But he was beginning to find one particular source of anxiety uppermost in his mind. He felt that the stranger's

deed was evading him. Might it not evade him indefinitely? Were there not deeds of this kind which remained permanently unknown? The man had certainly promised to meet him this evening, in the rue Saint-Antoine. But was Quinette simple-minded enough to count on that?

He tried to make exact suppositions, to reason closely.

"What could it have been? Something not so very serious, which did not attract the attention of the neighbours and about which the victim, for some reason or other, did not inform the police? Still, the man seemed very much upset. Of course, there are fellows who lose their heads and think themselves lost over next to nothing. Yes, but what about the smears of blood on the door-knob, the stains of blood on his hands, on his clothes? And his handkerchief? There's no doubt that blood flowed—plenty of blood."

Quinette kept coming back to the same picture: a little apartment looking out on a courtyard, on an upper floor. Silence all around; an almost empty house. (The other tenants were out at their work.) An old woman living alone in squalor, with her small savings. A canary in a cage. The man kills the old woman, or leaves her for dead. He strips her. He ransacks the furniture, the mattress, and makes his escape with a fairly large amount of money. (As a matter of fact, he offered Quinette money.)

The man was not a professional crook. He was too distraught. But would he come to the meeting-place that evening? Had he a strong enough reason for coming? Yes, the fear of being denounced to the police, with a very exact description of himself. But his fear of showing himself in public might prove stronger, not to speak of his distrust of Quinette, whose attitude must have seemed inexplicable to him.

"If he thinks he has found a safe hiding-place, he will stay lurking in it like a wild beast—even if he has a vague idea that it will be worth his while to meet me. In that case, he must have an animal instinct which dominates all his reasoning.

“What ought I to do if he doesn’t come?”

Quinette faced frankly all the risks he would run if he revealed that morning’s adventure to the police, too belatedly. His part in the affair would strike them as suspicious. Besides, he would be exposing himself to the possibility of revenge.

He imagined himself approaching the police.

“Inspector . . . I have something to report to you. . . .” He would assume his most dignified air as a respectable workman and tradesman. “A curious thing happened to me at home this morning. . . .” He would describe the scene in his shop, the man’s distress, the bloodstains. “He told me that he had hurt himself. I certainly thought it rather suspicious. But I couldn’t very well make a fuss, could I? I looked out into the street. Not a policeman to be seen. If I called for help, and if he was a criminal, he would have plenty of time to kill me. So I pretended to believe him. As he wanted to thank me, I suggested to him that we should have an *apéritif* together this evening, giving him to understand clearly that, if he did not come, I should consider myself entitled to regard his conduct as most unusual and disclose it as I thought fit. . . . Meanwhile, I was registering his appearance in my mind.”

The inspector might say, at the most :

“You would have done better to come and see me at once.”

But Quinette would reply :

“I should certainly have come if I had heard any talk about a crime in the neighbourhood. I even took the trouble to make inquiries, discreetly of course, as soon as I could leave my shop. I took steps, inspector, to carry out a regular investigation in the locality.”

He would add, emphasising still more his quality as a person of education :

“You understand, inspector, that I had scruples about causing annoyance to a man who might very well have been telling me the truth. Besides, it is none of my business to act as an informer.”

Quinette went into the café where they sold tobacco. The proprietor knew him slightly. Quinette took advantage of the fact to say, in the calmest possible tone of voice :

"I heard somebody saying just now that there had been a burglary in the neighbourhood. This morning or last night. Didn't you hear anything about it ?"

"No."

"It was some people going past my shop who said so ; but perhaps I misunderstood them."

Quinette picked up his box of matches and took his leave. As he went down the two steps that led up to the door of the café, he felt the strap of his Herculex pinch the flesh of his thigh again. But this little irritation was beginning to become familiar to him ; it even had a certain charm. It had the merit of recalling his attention to the vivifying electric current which his adventure had made him forget, but whose subtle encouragement he needed to feel, perhaps, more than ever.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF  
PAINTING AND THE  
PLEASURES OF BETTING

BY three o'clock in the afternoon the little group standing in the rue Montmartre in front of the painters' studio knew a lot of things that the morning's passers-by had to resign themselves to not knowing.

The inscription was now complete ; five lines painted (three in black, two in red, alternating), and a last line drawn in charcoal. You were no longer in the presence of an anonymous declaration. You knew the author of these rude remarks. It was Alfred, boot-seller. Here, in sum, was what he had to say :

BUSINESS MAKES ME SICK  
I'VE HAD ENOUGH  
I'M SELLING OUT ALL MY STOCK  
COME AND BE SHOD FOR NOTHING  
AT ALFRED'S  
EXPENSE

But the acquaintance which you had thus gained with Alfred was not limited to this. The artistic composition to the left of the lettering was finished so far as the drawing was concerned. Pécelet had worked on it at intervals, in accordance with his bursts of inspiration, and also to give himself a rest from his monotonous job of completing the lettering. Despite the absence of colours, and some

alterations, the subject was quite clear. It represented Alfred flinging pairs of boots away in all directions.

For the group of idlers, a large part of their interest in the work was thus exhausted. But for Péclet, the painter, it was only now, perhaps, that his most ticklish difficulties were beginning. Since the morning he had been wondering how, without too much detriment to his work, he could adapt himself to the boss's formula: three colours only, black included, and white in addition, in flat tints.

The people who were looking on behind his back would perhaps imagine that, if Péclet limited himself to this rudimentary colour-scheme, it was because he was incapable of doing anything better. This was a painful situation for a man who was a decorative painter of long standing, skilled in using blendings of colours, shadings-off, softenings. In his earlier days, when retail business favoured art more than it did now, he had painted pork-butchers' window-screens and ceilings, introducing into them hunting scenes, with huntsmen, hounds, and quarry, and other scenes, rustic and amorous in their inspiration, in eighteenth-century style. He had also adorned with figures and landscapes the paneling, piers, and door-lintel of one of the most attractive baker's shops in Belleville. If only he could send these people there — these people standing the other side of the window, who might be inclined to doubt his powers! Sometimes he had even done easel work, on summer Sundays, and he had at home a whole assortment of fine colours in tubes.

Well, he must do the best he could with a black, a brown, and a green, not to speak of the white, which was not included in the reckoning. It was Péclet himself who had chosen these colours, less for their suitability to the detail of the subject than for the general effect which he hoped to obtain. But how, with these wretched media, was he to achieve even a minimum of verisimilitude and variety?

Now that he had turned it all over and over again in his mind, the black would do for Alfred's coat and trousers, for his hair, for the pairs of black boots which he was

throwing away, and for his own boots. The brown: for his waistcoat – a fancy one – for his tie, and for the pairs of tan boots. The green: for his face, for his hands, and for a few strokes and spots which would represent the ground, seen in perspective. The white, which in any case stood out badly from the background of the calico, would indicate Alfred's collar, his shirt-front, and his socks. In addition, a few strokes of white here and there would help to break the monotony of the tints.

Péclet had cross-examined himself at length about the question of green. It might seem more natural to paint Alfred's face brown, since brown was not altogether too far removed from the ordinary tone of the skin. But the face would thus become the same colour as the tan boots, which would convey a disagreeable effect and would not be justified by any intellectual consideration. As he studied the text of the inscription, Péclet realised that, beneath its playfulness, it masked a certain amount of bitterness. It was not out of sheer light-heartedness, at least at the beginning, that a shopkeeper declared that he was giving up the struggle and offering his stock of shoes to the public for nothing – in other words, at a contemptible profit. One could, therefore, without too much improbability, make Alfred green in the face.

At this point the boss came into the studio. He had just finished an argument in the back shop with a commercial traveller about a supply of varnish. He approached Péclet.

"Will you be finished this evening? I should like to put you on to the pills to-morrow morning."

Péclet did not reply. His upper lip twitched several times under his moustache. He had little black eyes, rather deep-set, wrinkled lids, and greying eyebrows almost as big as his moustache was small. Finally, without taking his eyes off Alfred's portrait, he said:

"It's just like the Métro in my neighbourhood. I was saying the other day to the fellows who are building the line that it would suit me fine if they could finish it by next Monday."

He spoke in a soft voice, which issued from between his tongue and his nose ; and it trembled a little.

The boss waited a moment ; then he bent over the calico. He pointed to the traces of charcoal which had served to outline the letters and which the painting had not entirely covered. He tried to adopt a different tone, lest he should seem to be following the same train of thought.

“ You won’t forget to rub that out ? ”

“ Am I in the habit of forgetting ? ”

“ No ; but last time it was still to be seen. The customer tried to rub it out himself. He made a mess of it, of course. He called me in to see it. ‘ It annoyed me,’ he said, ‘ as much as if a tailor left the basting-threads in a coat. I’ve made a mess of it ; but it wasn’t my business to do it,’ he said.”

Before he replied, Péclet corrected with a touch of white any excessive weirdness that there might be about Alfred’s absolutely green ear.

“ What does he do, our friend, when the cobbler leaves a nail in his shoes ? ”

After that, he rolled a pellet of breadcrumbs and negligently cleaned the outlines of two or three letters.

“ I don’t dare rub hard,” he sneered. “ I’m afraid of going through.”

The boss turned away. He was a stout, fair man, with a strong profile and a thick, bushy moustache which clamoured to be curled. You see heads like his in the plain of Picardy or in Brussels. Twenty years ago he must have had a jaunty air, a roving eye.

Next he examined the gilt inscription cut in the imitation marble. The people on the other side of the big window envied this corpulent man for whom the expression : “ Accredited department ” held no secrets. In this they were wrong. All that the boss knew was that this panel had been ordered from him by a bank, and that it was to be placed over a door. Meanwhile, the group outside did not realise that it had just been swelled by a man who happened to be a bank employee. This man, who was merely

a receiving teller, could not exactly define "accredited" either. But he had an idea of what it meant. He had seen "accredited" customers quite close. He had spoken to them. They were important customers who would not transact business with any ordinary clerk.

The boss stroked his moustache and sniffed. He was going to say something about the workmanship of the gilt inscription; but he restrained himself. He walked a couple of paces away, stood in the middle of the studio, hesitated, and then asked:

"Where's Wazemmes?"

The painters raised their heads, exchanged glances, and appeared to be asking themselves whether the boss was serious or playing the fool. One of them decided to reply.

"Wazemmes? Why, he's at Enghien, of course!"

"What? To-day again?"

"He hasn't been there for the past fortnight."

"Yesterday at Saint-Cloud. Saturday at Longchamp. When it started, he wasn't to do this job more than once or twice a week. It's too much of a good thing."

"All the same, boss, you wouldn't have let the Blaviette be run without anything on it?"

These words thrilled the studio. The painters stopped painting and spoke all at once.

"Well, I didn't want to bet on the Blaviette."

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't interest me."

"Doesn't interest you - a five-thousand-yard steeple-chase, with a prize of ten thousand francs?"

"Interesting to watch, yes. Even then, there's no competition about it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Outside the Rothschild stable, what is there?"

"There's Nansouk and Fer."

"Fer doesn't count."

"He's given as favourite in more than half the papers."

"I tell you it was the Prix du Valentino that was worth

putting your money on. It must have been run by now, too. My fifty francs are as good as in my pocket. . . .”

The boss shrugged his shoulders and dug his nails into his palms behind his back.

“If you don’t mind, you can talk about all that later on. Until then, this is a painting studio here, not a betting booth.”

He disappeared into the back shop.

Meanwhile Wazemmes was edging his way through the racecourse crowd. The racing itself did not interest him very much. It mattered little to him whether it was Lari-pette, Jiu-jitsu, or Bastanac that passed the post first. When he thought of his comrades, it was to regard them as poor devils, afflicted with a rather ridiculous mania. As it was he who kept their accounts, he could not help realising that in the long run none of them made money. The luckiest, for all their boasting, lost, by betting, a score of francs a month, or nearly the equivalent of three days’ wages ; not to speak of their shares in Wazemmes’s travelling expenses, and the odd tips they gave him when they had a good day. To come and bet on the spot, when you had leisure, money in your pocket, and proper clothes – nothing could be better. What struck him as silly was paying for the fun of the fair at a distance.

The animation of the course amused him, in default of anything more exciting. But you met too many feverish, badly dressed gamblers. Wazemmes did not like their sickly, worried faces. He hated the eternal repetition that he overheard : “For the last three months Sosthène has lost his form ” . . . “I tell you that if Kazbek would exert himself, he couldn’t be beaten.”

Later, when he was rich, perhaps he would frequent the paddock – with a very elegant actress on his arm. One would glance at the new season’s fashions. Across the intervening top-hats, one would see the striped jackets of the jockeys. Nobody would be so ill-mannered as to look anxious. It was true that in ten years horses would be out

of fashion everywhere. They would disappear from race-courses as well as from the streets. They would give place to the motor-bicycle, the motor-car. Wazemmes and his actress would wait for motor-racing.

In the interim Wazemmes found the afternoons which he passed at the races quite tolerable. Among other pleasures he enjoyed that of mingling with a crowd which walked on grass, which had plenty of room, which did not crush you. Wazemmes was very sensitive about crowds. He detested violent demonstrations, street rows, public meetings.

This was not a matter of nervousness. His tallness, his physical strength spared him from knowing what fear was. It was the frenzy which emanated from such crowds that he disliked. He was not much fonder of the ordinary Sunday crowd on the boulevards. It let itself be pushed along all in the same direction, like a parcel, with senile slowness. It was dull. It always had a poverty-stricken air about it.

What suited Wazemmes was a fashionable crowd, which was not idle enough to develop boredom, but at the same time was not taut for action ; which moved in different directions with a certain liberty, and in which you could move easily yourself.

He heard shouts in the distance, which were repeated and drew nearer. He saw a swirl in the crowd. " Laripette ! Laripette ! " He pulled out a little note-book. " Hallo, Péclet has won ! "

At this moment somebody touched him on the shoulder. He recognised a gentleman whom he had seen two or three times at racecourses, but about whom he knew nothing else. They had never spoken to each other. This gentleman was as tall as himself. Wazemmes thought that his manners were really distinguished.

How old was he ? The young man would have found it very difficult to say. It was a problem of a kind in which he went astray, for lack of guiding marks. Thirty, forty meant nothing to him. In this respect he recognised only four categories in humanity : first, people younger than himself, whom he looked down upon ; second, people of

his own age, of whose ignorance, fatuity, and ridiculousness he was keenly conscious, but whose company he enjoyed despite all this ; third, old people, who were to be distinguished by their white hair, their deeply lined faces, and the fact that they were always beside the question. The fourth category consisted of a privileged group, from which Wazemmes recruited his models. They possessed pleasant jobs, fashionable clothes, money, the favour of women, the secrets of the motor-car.

This gentleman took his place among them. He had an authoritative, but kindly, voice. He softened it to speak to Wazemmes.

"How are you ?"

He added, in a tone which flattered the young man :

"You don't happen to be leaving the racecourse before the end ?"

"No. I have to stay. But why ?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

"But tell me, please." (This time Wazemmes was not going to let the hand of chance slip away from him.)

"Well, I wanted to ask you if you would send a telephone message for me. . . . You know how to use the telephone ?"

"I should think so."

"But it's no good talking about it, as you——"

"Yes, I can. How long would it take me ? Twenty minutes ?"

"Hardly that."

"Well, the next race is the Prix de l'Oisans, a steeplechase. I have no interest in that."

"Then here's the money for the telephone. Ask for this number. When you get it, just ask for 'Monsieur Paul.' Himself, you understand ? Nobody else."

"I'm to ask : 'Is that you, Monsieur Paul ?' "

"That's right. Say : 'Speaking for the boss.' Then dictate him the results of the first two races — slowly, so that he has time to write them down. Valentinois : first, Matsouyé ; second, Etendard III ; and so on. . . ."

"I know, I know."

"Spell the names if he doesn't hear clearly. In the Graisi-vaudan, in particular, I warn you that it would be easy to confuse Dialiba, who was third, with Kassaba, not placed. You have only to say: 'Dialiba, like diameter,' 'Kassaba, like——' like I don't know what. . . . I was going to say 'casket,' but that won't do, because of the 'K.' "

"I'll think of something."

"Oh, by the way - I shouldn't like to put you to any inconvenience. In case you should be delayed, have you any instructions to give me about the following race - the Prix de la Drôme, I think it is? . . ."

"Yes. Put two five francs on Joker, and one ten francs on Quolibet II."

"All right. And, to avoid any mistake, don't put anything on yourself until you see me again. I won't stir from here."

Wazemmes sped away in great delight.



A RADICAL DEPUTY'S  
DISCLOSURES TO HIS MISTRESS



“ I ’VE mentioned this oil business to you before, haven’t I ? ”

“ You mean about the refiners ? ”

“ Yes, the people who call themselves refiners. Those fellows are robbing the revenue of some dozens of millions of francs a year. I haven’t specialised in questions of this kind, and I don’t want to look like having a finger in every pie. I’ve tried to hand on the case to some of my colleagues. They’ve all dodged it.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because these oil-dealers exercise an influence which I’ve suspected, but which I’ve never come up against so far. Once the question is raised in the Chamber, they may not be strong enough to control the voting, or, what comes to the same thing, to prevent the Minister from committing himself to taking action. But nobody wants to raise the question.”

“ Have they all been bribed ? ”

“ Who ? My colleagues ? No – or, rather, of some of them it’s very difficult to say, and one may suppose that they have. But the rest, most of them – no. They simply don’t want to expose themselves personally to the hostility of such a powerful corporation. It has so many ways of injuring us. My colleagues all say to themselves : ‘ Why should it be I ? ’ ”

“ Ways of injuring you ? What, for example ? ”

"Oh, all kinds. For some of us, direct action in our constituencies – influential voters whom they can turn against us, mayors, sub-prefects. For others, the press. In my case, for example, they will try particularly to get at me through the newspapers."

"They will try, you say? Does that mean you intend to——"

"Yes, I can't avoid it. I gave notice to raise the question the other day."

"But what are you going to let yourself in for, my dear? The papers, especially – that will be a bad business. You need their support."

Germaine, who knew very well that her connection with Gurau was public property, already saw herself the object of attack in the smaller papers, or pointed out to the critics in a discreet conspiracy of silence.

"It can't be helped. I'm not doing this light-heartedly; I'm compelled to do it."

"By whom?"

"Because somebody has to do it sooner or later. Besides, it was into my hands that the case was put."

"Why was it put into your hands? May it not be a trap?"

"Certainly not. This good fellow has gone to the trouble of getting up the case for the past six months, perhaps. Besides, it's extremely well done. It's unanswerable, crushing. He must have a bachelor's degree at least, in law or in science. The civil service is full of well-educated men nowadays. You may tell me that he should have gone to his own deputy. But I couldn't very well tell him so. On the contrary, I had to thank him for the honour he was doing me. . . ."

"You're joking."

"Not at all. This boy is still at the age when one believes in such things. He admires me. He regards me as an honest, courageous man. If I had referred him to the deputy for his own constituency, he would have told me, in the first place, that a Parisian does not think the same of his

deputy as a countryman does, which is true, and, in the next place, that the deputy in question is a fool or a man with no prestige. . . . No, there was no getting out of it for me. Not to speak of the fact that he was giving me a lesson in courage. He's risking a great deal himself."

"You might have told him that you were not competent to handle the case; or that your work on the Foreign Affairs Commission took up all your time."

"Yes, if I had had to carry out researches myself, make an investigation, or even sort the documents. But there's nothing like that. You can't imagine the documentation he has given me. It's a marvel. To start with, eight pages of summary, in which he states the facts and discloses the situation. Then a report on the documents, with three or four lines of analysis for each. Next the documents themselves. Finally four pages of conclusions, in which the measures to be taken are indicated. And throughout, the most precise references: the article of the penal code which is being violated; the governmental decrees and regulations, with their dates; the statistics."

"Has he done this for revenge?"

"Not at all. He's done it because his duties put him in a position to discover this abominable swindling and because it disgusted him. In short, I could get up in the Chamber an hour from now and speak without any other notes except his. . . . It's as simple as that. If I become a minister some day, you may bet I shall take this fellow as my parliamentary secretary. . . . By the way, you were talking about foreign affairs. But that objection isn't worth anything. America and England are closely mixed up in this business. No, I couldn't get out of it. Besides, I assure you that it's perfectly scandalous. If I had that brief in my hands and didn't do anything with it, I should be making myself the accomplice of these people."

Gurau finished his coffee and sipped his little glass of brandy. The glow of a good meal increased his confidence in himself, his contempt for risks. It revived a kind of disinterested enthusiasm which he had in him.

The yellow silk curtains gilded all the high lights of the furniture. You might imagine that you were in a cosy inn in the heart of Burgundy. The landlord, instead of seating you at the common table, had put a little private dining-room at your disposal. A village sun was purring like a cat outside.

After all, it was pleasant to be a deputy with some reputation. It was stimulating to think that a young civil servant, well educated and full of ideals, thought enough of you – enough both of your probity and of your power – to ask you to break down the feudal privileges of the French oil-barons.

Germaine had kept on her Nagasaki silk kimono, as Gurau had begged her to do. At the neck of it you could see the budding of her breasts, the delightful hollow that separated them. The bedroom was close at hand. This lovely, fair body would be his within the next half-hour if he liked. Love, the appeal of the senses, went very well with political activity, even of the most upright kind.

If that young civil servant could see Gurau at this moment, sitting at table opposite his mistress, would he be disappointed? Would he lose his faith in Gurau? Why should he? Except for Robespierre, so they said, no political hero had ever kept any vow of chastity. Become soft in pleasure and luxury? . . . But this wasn't luxury. This dining-room was delightful, like the rest of the apartment, because Germaine was a dear little person who had good taste and knew how to make a little money go a long way. But you would only make people laugh if you talked about luxury in connection with such a modest interior as this.

And even in this connection Gurau took rather unusual precautions. He made it a rule never to leave anything that belonged to him in his mistress's apartment. Nothing, above all, that smacked of practical convenience. It would have disgusted him to find there, in accordance with time-honoured custom, a suit of pyjamas and a pair of slippers.

Was this merely a sense of elementary prudence? He

did not think so. He had always distrusted, perhaps as the result of a certain doctrinaire prejudice, that sentimentality about "home," that very idea of "home," which struck him as essentially middle-class. To the mischievous charm of soft, snug domesticity he attributed that kind of degeneracy, that tendency to put on flesh, that sleepiness, which he so often deplored in men older than himself. Deliberately, despite his taste for creature comforts, he had kept up the manner of life of the student ; and he would have laughed at himself if it had ever occurred to him that, by way of a love-affair, he was seeking the commonplace cosiness which he thought it hygienic to deny himself.

He was just like a wayfarer here. He had just had a good lunch at an inn ; and he enjoyed the favour of the hostess, which did him no harm.

Germaine looked at him out of her beautiful, bright blue eyes, those speaking, caressing eyes of hers. She would be quite sure that she was in love with him if only she knew just what other women meant by love, or rather if she were better informed about the degree in which she was capable of it. Certainly she did not feel towards Gurau anything that resembled the passion which people wrote about. Yet she could see a kind of beauty in him.

The skin of his face was perhaps a little wrinkled, a little loose, a little ashen in colour. But his eyes were exquisitely tender when he looked at her and thought about her ; full of fire and authority when he imagined himself at grips with other people ; and, above all, of a delightful shade of grey that made the blue of her own eyes seem very hard to her. He had a very mobile mouth, rather disillusioned and ironical ; and a voice whose tone and inflection gave her almost continual pleasure. It was a pity that he did not shave more closely. His hair was turning prematurely grey ; but the grey suited him.

Some day she would make him shave off that moustache of his, which was commonplace and meaningless. Clean shaven, and well shaven, he would have the air of an aristocrat of the old régime. He even had a fine head for an

actor, if he wanted to be one. She could easily imagine him in certain rôles from classic repertory. Finally, he was very clever. Germaine liked a man with brains.

He had just been talking to her about his responsibilities in connection with the oil business. She was greatly tempted to confide her own troubles in connection with the sugar business to him ; but she did not dare. He would either laugh at her or else be annoyed. Perhaps he might say : " My mistress has no right to speculate. What wouldn't people say if it came out ? - and everything comes out in the long run. Your twenty thousand kilos would become twenty thousand tons. It would be made to look as clear as daylight that I was speculating myself, with you as my intermediary, that I was snatching their pieces of sugar out of the widows' and orphans' coffee-cups. I should cut a fine figure attacking the oil-magnates after that."

Germaine generally respected Gurau's scruples, because she realised that they might help him in his career. Personally she was not predisposed towards understanding idealistic reasons for doing things ; and when she questioned herself, she did not believe that they had the last word with anybody. But everybody adopted a style in life and struck an attitude. Afterwards mere decency, if not self-interest, counselled you to remain faithful to it. If, for example, a politician had built up his reputation upon his devotion to higher causes, it would be as risky for him to become a cynical profiteer as it would be for a famous comedian to change his style of acting.

Besides, the moral graces are part of the attractiveness of certain men in affairs of the heart. Just as the woman seeks to be beautiful in order to please, so the man seeks to be worthy of admiration. The woman whom he loves must lend herself to this game. If she shows herself sceptical, if she emphasises certain weaknesses, certain contradictions, in her lover, she is being as *maladroit*, with an insight as futilely cruel, as a man who draws his mistress's attention to her wrinkles or her double chin.

At this moment Germaine remembered the news she had

read a little time ago. She was surprised that Gurau had not yet mentioned it to her. Was she to suppose that this oil business of his blinded him to the affairs of Europe ?

"But," she asked, "aren't you afraid that, with all these things happening in the East, your raising the question about oil may pass unnoticed ?"

He reflected a moment before he answered. He found in Germaine's remark that common sense which was usual in her. He realised that, curiously enough, while as a private individual he appreciated all the gravity of the events to which she referred, as a politician he was careful not to exaggerate their importance.

"No," he said at length. "I don't think so."

"Why ? Because the situation is not really as serious as it looks ?"

"No, I don't think that either."

"I mean, not so serious for us French ?"

"Yes, it is, very serious for us."

"Really serious ?"

"As serious as it possibly could be."

He took another sip of brandy. He beamed at the smooth reflections on the furniture. He felt full of good humour and clearness of mind. Nowhere could he be better off to estimate the situation than he was here. Events presented themselves to him in the plain light of distance and with a kind of historical obviousness about them. He imagined himself in the eighteenth century, in a bright inn, chatting with philosophical friends and pretty women about the troubles of the time and its approaching dangers.

He repeated :

"As serious as it possibly could be. It is not at all impossible, in spite of the smooth look of things, that within three weeks there may be a European war, with France involved. . . ."

"But why ? . . ."

"I do not say that it is very probable, but that it is not at all impossible. Why ? Because there has been created in Europe, to everybody's knowledge and at the same time

without anybody knowing anything about it – I mean to say that anybody could have seen it for himself, but that scarcely anybody has – such a system that a move by a Montenegrin bandit chief is enough to send us all stumbling into an unfathomable catastrophe. It makes no difference what party is in power in France. There may simply be no choice in the matter. But even Jaurès himself declines to say so. He prefers to shed tears over the Turks.”

He reflected again. He thought fleetingly of that young, idealistic civil servant with the documents about oil. It was perhaps with him in his mind that he went on :

“Here is one of the mysteries of politics – in the same sense as one talks about the mysteries of science. Why is it that a man like myself does not burn to intervene in this business, and leave until later his question about oil, which will easily keep? Why doesn’t he write this very day to Clemenceau and tell him that this is no time to go and make an electioneering tour in the Var, but that he ought to summon the Chambers with all speed? Why doesn’t he, eh?”

“When do the Chambers meet?”

“They’re talking about the 13th. Between now and then, there is plenty of time for everything to blow up. So why, I ask you? Because there may be an appalling European situation, but there is no parliamentary situation that corresponds with it. There is nothing to be done. Yes, there is, though: somebody might get up, by arrangement with the government, and extract a reassuring declaration from Pichon or Clemenceau – if it isn’t already too late. I’m not going to take on a little job like that. But otherwise – to whom, or to what, can one turn? . . . If we had a ministry of the Right, or even simply a Delcassé at the Quai d’Orsay . . . then, perhaps. But Pichon? Pichon would ask me: ‘But what do you expect me to do?’

“If you prefer to put it that way, it’s too big a job. What one has to indict is the whole of European diplomacy for the past thirty years. If you bring an indictment like that, people will listen to you, if you are a good enough speaker,

but just in the same way as they would listen to Bossuet delivering a sermon about the instability of human affairs. Jaurès has scored a success of that kind once or twice. But that's not the way to upset a government. On the contrary, you will be inscribed, so to speak, on a black list, made up of nebulous people who are incapable, as they say, of making a statesman. And for that matter, if the Bloc came to life again or some other combination were formed and Jaurès were persuaded to accept a portfolio, even that of Foreign Affairs, Jaurès himself would serve no other purpose except to cover up the implacable working of the machine with his large person and the sound of his voice."

Germaine had no difficulty in following his drift. She could not visualise the details of things so clearly as Gurau, to whom they were the stuff of his daily life. But whenever anything involving competency and discretion, any matter of self-interest or personal ambition, was concerned, something instinctive enabled her to grasp even a hint. In a way, all this almost made Gurau dearer to her. She experienced a feeling of almost conjugal solidarity with him.

It was only for a moment that her emotions strayed in this direction. Gurau was gazing into her eyes insistently ; and she gazed back into his and let herself be carried away by the intoxication of this meeting of their eyes. Then Gurau's eyes slid down to Germaine's neck and shoulders. Again she could understand him and respond to him. She knew at once that she had awakened his desire. She congratulated herself, too, that she had stayed wrapped up in this kimono of hers, still new enough for her to enjoy a novel pleasure in wearing it, which had helped to preserve about their meal together an atmosphere of physical love.

Gurau was not unaware of the twofold game which his own mind was playing. Indeed, he appreciated its slightly scandalous aspect. To combine an explanation of the European situation with a delightful obsession by two fair breasts - he saw clearly that, in the eyes of a simple man, there might be something corrupt, something decadent, about it. He would have been embarrassed himself if he had

had to express at that precise moment his faith in the future or some suggestion of an apostolic mission. (Not that he felt much vocation to any apostolate.)

But excitement of the senses went well with presentiment of impending catastrophe. In the eighteenth century, as a matter of fact, had not people talked about the coming collapse of the régime without losing sight of the contour of a pretty throat? He thought of Choiseul, of Turgot; but he placed them in a rather vague setting, for his history of France was not at the moment very clear in his mind.

Germaine did not deceive herself, either, about the meaning of Gurau's gaze. But she did not need any process of reasoning to justify it. In the first place, she was not so sure as he was about the relative importance of the fate of Europe and a pretty woman's bosom. In the next place, a woman is always capable of associating physical love with any other activity whatsoever, even the most intellectual. Once her first shamefacedness is overcome, a woman is ready to lavish her caresses in the intervals of a man's most transcendental thinking. The idea of incongruity never occurs to her, nor does that of hypocrisy. She would scarcely be surprised if her lover, a prince of the Church, should develop an interest in her bosom while he was drafting a sermon on chastity.



*A CHILD OF HIS TIME*



**I**N his train Jerphanion unfolded the Paris paper which he had bought at the last stop. He looked at this sheet with a kind of friendliness.

"This is the paper, or another like it – it doesn't matter much – which I shall be reading there. In any case, it's a Paris paper. It's news arranged like this, doled out like this, that I shall get. This is the outlook on the world which will be mine every morning, whether I like it or not. It's here – on the third or fourth page ; I don't know yet, but I shall soon learn – that I shall find my local news. No more reports about the drunkard picked up in the avenue de la Gare by Police Sergeant X or Y, so popular with our fellow-citizens ; or about the violation by a bicyclist of the regulation for riding without a number-plate or a light ; or about the distribution of prizes at the Brothers' school, with the list of those who have passed ; or about the honorific distinction conferred upon the popular and painstaking leader of the railway choral society. . . ."

A Paris paper comes open little by little, like a surprise box ; you dip into one section after another ; you take out one bottom after another. A paper is something you read in puffs, with pauses for reflection in between, as you smoke a cigar. And there is no place more suitable than a moving train for this jerky, fugitive amusement, this way of playing hide-and-seek with the world, with yourself, with boredom.

"The only French newspaper linked by its own private wires with the four leading capitals of the globe." What

were they? London, Paris, New York, Berlin, apparently. He was not so sure about the order of importance. Hadn't New York's population surpassed that of Paris?

An enormous streamer headline: "*Bulgaria proclaimed her independence yesterday.*" "So that's the big news of the day. I must read all that later on, line by line. Let's see what else there is."

"Our Navy. Interview with M. Thomson." Jerphanion tried to remember the list of Cabinet ministers: Premier, Clemenceau. Briand, Justice. Caillaux, Finance. Doumergue, Public Instruction. Pichon, Foreign Affairs. And Thomson, so it seemed, Minister of Marine. For the moment, the others escaped him.

What was he to think of this Ministry? It had the air of belonging to the Left. It was an heir, now a remote one, of the Dreyfus affair. In some respects it was a continuation of the Bloc. In others it was a reaction against Combism. It was trying, with the least possible disturbance, to settle the religious question: separation of Church and State, the Orders, etc. . . . It was going to establish the income-tax — one of the leading ideas of the present régime. It looked after the Army, and the Navy, apparently, too. It reassured patriotic people. It combated revolutionary syndicalism and antimilitarism. It was no friend of the Socialists.

Clemenceau? A picturesque personality, impulsive, always striving for effect. Ambitious, dissatisfied, with something of the failure in his composition. A bit of an adventurer; a bit of a boulevardier. A famous journalist whom nobody read. An abominable writer whose style everybody praised. (Jerphanion had a horror of what little he knew of his pretentious, philosophising, swollen prose.) On the other hand, a kind of genius in action; an exciting, vivid, cavalier way of governing. He was some compensation for all those ceremonious, funereal people — Brisson and the rest of them.

Briand? A man rather too clever, a bit of an enigma, but a likeable fellow. Caillaux? A very strong man, so they said, but cold, proud, eccentric. . . .

What was he to make of politicians in general? Jerphanion had no prejudice against them. He attached a great deal of importance to public affairs. But the men who controlled them did not inspire him with either affection or enthusiasm. Why not? Perhaps because they were lacking in heroism, in single-mindedness. Was that their fault? Perhaps not. Perhaps it was the fault of the material they had to handle.

Sometimes Jerphanion had wondered whether he would go into politics himself. It had been predicted that he would. He doubted it; or at least he would have to find himself in circumstances of a different kind, living in a period when heroism and single-mindedness held their rightful place, when the material to be handled was nobler stuff. A revolution?

What had our Thomson to say? That the explosion aboard the *Latouche-Treville* was very regrettable, but that the inquiry would bring everything to light. The lack of liaison between the Navy and the Director of Artillery would be remedied. Let us have confidence. "Never had there been such devotion, such magnificent steadfastness. . . . If the day came . . ." and so forth. Clearly a man who thought that it was champagne-time and coughed up an after-dinner speech.

"Wright raises heavy weights." Jerphanion was interested in airplanes, but with all kinds of reservations. He expected nothing good of these machines. He thought of submarines, which so far had served for nothing but to provide militarists with a new means of destruction. Far from rejoicing over what was already naïvely called "the conquest of the air" – as though there were anything to be conquered in the air: gold mines, oil wells, the capitals of the birds! – he was annoyed that the air should cease to be a place apart, a forbidden zone, where the dreams of men might roam just because man did not enter it.

"M. Dujardin-Beaumetz takes precautions against fire at Versailles and the Louvre." "That's true – I was forgetting Dujardin-Beaumetz. Under-Secretary of State for Fine

Arts, now become a life-job. One of those mediocrities who have found the right string to pull."

"A Parisian's Gossip." Clément Vautel was making fun of the pacifists. Vautel, heir to Hardouin's mantle. One of those notorious exponents of the common-sense point of view, who make it their business, from generation to generation, to confirm the average man in his low-brow range of thought. In his routine as a domestic animal. In his pot-bellied optimism. One of those people thanks to whom the reign of the rogues goes on. At the moment he was trying to discredit the Peace Tribunal at The Hague. Jerphanion did not believe that the Hague Tribunal was going to perform miracles; but he would have liked to have this Parisian in his peasant's hands.

He turned the page. "The panic on the Bourse." That was in connection with the Balkan crisis. To be read later on, with the rest of it. . . .

"Conference Notes. The General Workers' Federation at Marseilles." The Mayor of Marseilles having prohibited the discussion of an antimilitarist resolution in the hall of the Labour Exchange, a municipal building, the Congress had removed to another hall.

Militarism, antimilitarism - these were not mere words to Jerphanion. They meant a vast range of thought, in whose very centre he had had a vivid experience. For a whole year, from the sounding of Reveille to the sounding of Lights Out, Jerphanion had meditated about militarism. He had made thousands of individual reflections. He had encountered hundreds of detailed ideas, brand-new as inventions. He had discovered numerous points of view. He had rejected no kind of mental verification. He had tried to think about the Army successively as a dragoon officer, as a N.C.O., as a private in an African battalion, as a peasant, as an intellectual. No argument was a novelty to him.

He thanked these General Workers' Federation people for being the only people in France who were trying to take militarism by the throat. But he was a little distrustful of

their leaders and their organisation. Citizen Pataud, who amused himself with frightening the middle classes by cutting off the electricity throughout Paris for five minutes, really took up too much of the picture, and he lacked subtlety in his methods. He might be a fine fellow; but there seemed to be too much of the mountebank and the agitator about him. Among the other leaders, you felt that there were only too many of those lads whom the middle classes suspected, with some show of reason, because they incarnated the defects of their qualities: laziness, disorderliness, wastefulness, boastfulness – the very type of the bad worker who changed his job every three months, perorated in cafés, and ran into debt at the butcher's, and whose dream was to become a trade-union secretary.

Alas! thought Jerphanion, the process of selection which goes on among the people works against the people. The best of them, the most industrious, the most honest, escape from the working-class. They become small employers themselves. They prepare a middle-class future for their children. Among those who stay behind to lead the people, to staff the working-class organisations, there are, no doubt, some men with good brains and pure hearts. But it is pretty certain that some blemish or other has kept them in that proletariat whose movements they direct.

"Such," thought Jerphanion, "is the interplay of forces in capitalist society."

"Business men deliberate." What about? About the breakdown of the telephone system. "Confessions of a Spy." This was an article in a series, interesting, too, remarkably circumstantial in its details, quite likely to be authentic. It emerged from it that Germany was employing spies in France and giving them very sensible instructions. Apparently France was using spies in Germany too, and busying herself about baffling hers. All this was a specialised job, just like the stock exchange, whose quotations were given at the foot of page five. Specialists fought among

themselves on their own ground. They would be disappointed if there was nobody for them to fight.

But what was the paper's object in publishing this series of articles? To let the public know that spies were at work in France? But, unless the public were utter idiots, they must have some suspicion of it already. Besides, what did the paper want you to do about it? Was the public expected to shake the General Staff out of its somnolence, if necessary?

No doubt it was. But you knew, for that matter, that there were such things as microbes. Still, if your paper made you read an article about microbes, about their activity and their ravages, every morning; if it chose for this campaign the very moment when telegrams on the third page were telling you almost every day about the progress of cholera in Russia, you would get into a sufficiently receptive state of mind for the idea of the danger from microbes to occupy a prominent place in it; and if your eyes fell afterwards, on the very last page, on advertisements of antiseptics, "whose efficacy in all epidemics is recognised by the medical profession," these advertisements would produce, in your carefully prepared mind, the very best results that the chemists could expect.

So it was not altogether without interest to remark that the series: "Confessions of a Spy" ran parallel with the series: "Balkan Crisis."

To get back to the main news: "France, England, and Russia will act in agreement." How could it be more clearly implied that Europe, divided into two, was only awaiting an opportunity — this one or some other one — to come together again in the explosion of war: the Triple Entente and the Austro-German Alliance, growing bigger, growing blacker, one over against the other, like two enormous clouds?

At the foot of the page, on the right-hand side, was a comparative table, spread across two columns: "In case of war, Bulgaria could put in the field: Standing Army, 90,000 infantry, etc. . . . Reserves . . . etc. . . . Total, 378,000

infantry, 7,000 cavalry, 520 guns. Turkey could put in the field : . . . Total, 1,454,000 men ; guns, 1,700."

A note pointed out that the Bulgarian Army, although much inferior in numbers, was more homogeneous, better armed, and equipped with more modern material than the Turkish Army.

In the rest of the paper, on the first, second, and third pages, were about a dozen columns of official or semi-official statements, comments, telegrams, newspaper extracts. . . . On the third page, under the heading : "Fresh Franco-German Incident," a message from Morocco, via Berlin, reminded anybody who might otherwise overlook the fact that, in case the Balkan pretext should not suffice, the Moroccan pretext was still available, and that behind any European conflict loomed the threat of a Franco-German conflict.

War. Since his childhood Jerphanion had lived under the curse of war. When he was six years old, what had they taught him in his village school ? The metric system ; but also about Alsace-Lorraine and Reichsoffen. Very soon after he knew who the Devil was, he had learned the name of Bismarck. Among his schoolfellows, "Prusco" was still a terrible insult. The covers of his school copy-book showed him MacMahon, Chanzy, Faidherbe. From the time when he was capable of thinking, he had smelt, emanating from those coloured pages, together with the odour of paper, the odour of bitterness, of defeat. Under the picture of a cavalryman in a two-horned hat, a note vaunted a little local victory : Coulmiers, Bapaume. Even a six-year-old child notices what is sour and lamentable in such consolations.

When he raised his nose from his desk, it was to gaze at the map of France, whose yellow or green would have looked so cheerful but for that wide violet-grey blot stuck up against the escarpment of the Vosges. It was as though you could see, flitting about the class-room like a couple of bats, the twofold black head-dress of the lost provinces. The child of the Velay dare not enjoy the air of his own

mountains. His reading-book told him stories of sharpshooters, of the siege of Paris, of bayonet charges. His recitation lesson made him learn Déroulède's *Clairon*, pages from *L'Année terrible*.

Jerphanion could still see those conical caps, those long beards, all that crowd, at once military and suburban ; all that Second Empire ending in dirtiness and disorder, which the pictures in his school-books helped him to evoke and which he found even on the dessert plates at family dinner-parties. For, when they filled the glasses with liqueurs, when the grown-ups started talking all at once and in loud voices, the child, if he moved aside his little cake, might disclose the battle of Champigny, a bivouac of the Army of the East, Gambetta in the car of his balloon. And, when play-time came, there was always some old dotard, wearing an "Imperial" beard, to tap you on the cheek and say : " You, young man - you'll belong to the generation of the revenge."

Later on, when he was at school at Le Puy, and then at Lyons, the obsession had become more unobtrusive. But the boy was beginning to pick up street gossip, talk about public affairs ; and it was still the spirit of war that breathed in it. His earliest memory of politics was the condemnation of Captain Dreyfus. What Dreyfus was accused of was having given away to Germany the secret of certain weapons to be used in the next war. His second political memory was the Russian alliance, some journey or other of the President or the Tsar, and the joy, the sense of confidence, which had spread even into the provinces at the thought that, when the time came to fight again, France would no longer fight alone.

Then there was the Fashoda scare, with its sense of relief that this time it had nothing to do with Germany, and that the enemy had momentarily shifted position, as a headache does. Then came the truce of the Universal Exhibition, with its sounds of dancing and its rubbing of elbows by nations curious about one another, but not friendly, like holiday-makers meeting on a beach ; the dawning of the twentieth century, too long awaited, jaded in advance,

hectically brilliant, shot with false lights, charged from the earliest hours that followed it with sinister streaks of war.

Ten years back, indeed, not content with heralding its presence, war had started roaming around Europe, snapping and snatching at loose ends here and there : the Spanish-American war, the Transvaal war, the Russo-Japanese war. Every time the lightning flashed more vividly ; the thunder rolled more loudly ; and even in the most peaceful cities of the West the warning wind raised dust and dead leaves.

Jerphanion crumpled up his paper and flung it into a corner.

“ Not to-day. I don't want to think about all that.”

He went and stood in the corridor, pressed his face to the window, invoked the tranquil beauty of autumn, the youthfulness of his body, all the reasons he had for being happy.

“ After all, I have my own destiny to think about. It is fresh, irreverent, unimpaired. Lots of other men have been twenty with humanity in a worse state of disorder and under signs more lowering than to-day. The essential thing is to be twenty years of age. When I say that the world begins with me, I am a fool if I imagine that everything is going to adapt itself to my liking. But I am a wise man if I mean that I am going to treat my own life as a series of absolutely new events, to which the rest of the world may serve as a setting and an opportunity. It is up to me to prove so strong that even a convulsion of this continent becomes just one of my episodes.”

TWO FORCES. TWO MENACES

AT about half-past four M. de Champcenais, who had just crossed the Puteaux bridge in his motor-car, and Clanricard, who was walking along the rue Custine, opposite the rue Clignancourt, both came in for a rather exciting time.

De Champcenais was on his way to see Bertrand, the motor-car manufacturer. They had made the appointment two days ago. Its object was the conclusion of a deal about which Bertrand seemed to be keen, but which in itself did not particularly interest Champcenais and his associates. Bertrand had taken it into his head to give his name to a special motor-oil, which he would recommend his customers to use exclusively. But he had no means either of producing this oil or of storing it or of distributing it. Accordingly he had suggested the following arrangement to the oil-manufacturers : they would manufacture for him an oil which would not really be special, but whose viscosity would be slightly different from that in general use ; they would put it up in tins of a particular shape, and control its distribution and sale under the name of Bertrand Oil. Bertrand would take a commission of ten centimes on every two-litre tin sold under his name.

Champcenais, who at first was inclined to reject the scheme, had afterwards seen a way of making it not at all a bad business for the oil-manufacturers. In the recommendations which he would make to his customers, Bertrand could include the advice to empty the crank-case of the engine completely every fifteen hundred kilometres.

Hitherto no such practice was common. People contented themselves, as a rule, with filling up with oil again when the level sank ; and they found that it sank quite fast enough as it was.

Champcenais calculated that periodical emptying of the crank-case, applied even to a percentage of the twenty-five thousand Bertrand cars of all kinds which were then running, would involve an extra consumption of oil exceeding two hundred and fifty thousand litres a year. The motorists of that period were in constant fear and trembling about the good running and resistance to depreciation of their machines. Even the most heedless by nature had contracted chronic anxiety, and if they were ever tempted to shake it off, a sudden breakdown plunged them back into it. Accordingly it was child's play, for anybody who knew the sources of their psychology, to make them spend an additional hundred francs each a year.

Besides, Bertrand was supposed to have some powerful connections in political circles. Champcenais proposed to ask him to make use of them in favour of the oil-manufacturers when the threatened question was raised in the Chamber. He would make this one of the tacit conditions of their agreement.

As he drove through the Bois de Boulogne, Champcenais summed the matter up in his mind and marshalled the arguments he intended to use with Bertrand. He also thought about advertising formulas which he would suggest their adopting. " By using a centime's worth of oil, you will save a franc's worth of repairs." Champcenais was trying out this slogan for the fourth or fifth time as they crossed the Puteaux bridge.

At this moment he noticed a number of men, in caps and working-clothes, leaning on the parapet of the bridge, on both sides. Further away, on the opposite bank of the Seine, there was a crowd of men of similar appearance. They were standing almost motionless. They occupied the roadway and the pavements, scarcely leaving room for cars to pass.

This crowd, in the fairly clear light of the declining day, had something earthy about it. It resembled tilth freshly turned.

Champcenais experienced a sudden tremor.

"Don't drive too fast," he said to his chauffeur. Only a feeling of shame prevented him from turning back.

He added, after a pause: "Above all, mind you don't hit anybody. . . . Is there a strike on? . . . You couldn't try to get around?"

The car was already engulfed in the crowd. The chauffeur sounded his horn, somewhat imperiously. At the sound of it faces turned towards the car. Champcenais had them quite close to him. It struck him that he had never seen so many faces of working men, so many faces of the people. Silent, drawn faces – scarcely threatening, inasmuch as menace implies the idea of approaching action; but very alarming, because you felt that, in their eyes, no action was impossible.

The car drove on at a walking pace. Champcenais, almost in spite of himself, put his arm out of the window, and tapped the chauffeur on the shoulder to remind him to be careful. He imagined the mudguard of the car bumping into a man and knocking him down; and immediately a surge of the crowd around the car, a roar, shouting, the car being pushed over towards the river, flung into the water with its contents.

He had a sense of discovering reality, preposterous and solid, on emerging out of a dream peopled by fantasies of his own. His negotiations with Bertrand, his calculations about consumption of oil, the ten-centimes-a-tin commission, parliamentary influences – he had to make an effort to go on believing that these abstract imaginings really corresponded with existing things. He was not accustomed to becoming anxious over nothing. He knew how to close his eyes in order to eliminate appearances which might embarrass him in his outlook on life. But this time his eyes insisted upon remaining open, and they showed him faces, eyes, caps, the meshes of an elastic crowd in which the car

was caught and in which every turn of its wheels seemed bound to be the last.

He repeated to himself, rather stupidly : " But what's it all about ? There hasn't been anything about a strike in the papers these days, has there ? I wonder whether Bertrand's factory is on strike."

So the papers might simply say nothing at all about a crowd like this, might give the passer-by no warning of it. You might stumble unexpectedly into this earthy density of people. That was the way society was made. You were a fool to trust it. A kind of submarine danger prowled around all the time, threatening to tip you up like a fishing-boat.

An extraordinary question shot through Champcenais's mind : " Are these men like myself ? "

He was alone. He need not strike any becoming attitude. So he put the question to himself as honestly as he could. But he hesitated about answering it. He thought of that childhood's comrade of his, now an officer in Morocco, who had spent his whole career in the colonies and talked about the " natives." Wasn't this crowd of strikers, the colour of earth, a kind of " native " mass, a kind of conquered people ? How could you keep these people in their place ? How could you go on keeping them in their place ?

Champcenais contemplated the back of his chauffeur. This man so close to him materially, in his presence for so many hours of his day, was undoubtedly, up to a certain point, a man like himself. He could not blind himself to that fact. He was even a man of some physical distinction, sure of himself, talking at his ease. Instead of sitting in the driver's seat of the car, he might – just imagine it ! – be sitting inside.

But just as easily – this was a most disturbing thought – he might be in that crowd, and suddenly turn his head and look at Champcenais – look at him with a look that came from the other side, from the opposite bank. . . .

Well, for the time being, he was on this side, more or less ; and of the two of them, Champcenais and he, it was he who

looked at this populace, in whom the car was entangled, with the more contemptuous irritation.

Clanricard, who had left his school in the rue Saint-Isaure half an hour earlier, was walking along in no hurry. When he reached the corner of the rue Clignancourt and the rue Custine, he noticed that people were looking in the direction of the boulevard Barbès, and soon he heard the clattering of a troop of horse. He stopped.

A squadron of dragoons was riding up the rue Custine, coming from the crossing of the Château-Rouge. The horsemen, in field uniform, advanced in columns of four, with an officer at their head. In the horses' legs, in the rippling of their chests, in the sudden rude behaviour of hind quarters to right or left, in the way in which a man pulled at his bridle, and in the way in which the noise of iron on paving suddenly rang louder, there was a sense of compressed force, an overflowing of strength and mettle-someness, a thousand stresses packed in like springs in a sack.

The men were looking at the ears of their mounts, or at the back of the comrade in front of them. They paid no attention to the street. If they thought about it at all, it was for the pleasure they took in humiliating it, like fuddling themselves with red wine at the canteen.

Clanricard, to his astonishment, felt a kind of shudder of delight run through him. The skin of his face twitched and quivered. He started being alive with that kind of intensity which makes the whole substance of life become responsive, and the whole body of a living being enjoy itself.

He loved strength. He enjoyed strength. He experienced as a pleasure the contemptuous passing of that squadron through a street just wide enough to hold it, and the vague threat which it carried in some unknown direction.

He said to himself vaguely : " They are afraid." " They will be afraid."

They - who ? Everybody - the enemy, the weak, those

who had to be crushed, those who had to be kept in obedience and servitude; those who were born to feel the weight of force, to bow down to it in a cowardice at once affectionate and dutiful. They - who? Clanricard himself; his ancestors, his descendants, all through the ages.

These thoughts swept through him like a squall, like a whirlwind of sand and débris. He was blinded by them. He had no power to judge these thoughts, no power at all, not even that of being ashamed of them. Barely did he realise, with the fleeting lucidity of a drunken man, that in all this there was something very frightening for the fate of humanity, for the near future, for those events whose threat had given him, ever since morning, a feeling of pressure at his temples.

The hind quarters of the last horses of the squadron, switching their tails nervously, dwindled away, were swallowed up by the street, merged into the substance of Paris. But the schoolmaster could not even succeed in seeing one of his poor children looking at him.

  
 A LITTLE BOY'S LONG JOURNEY  


CLANRICARD had not seen Louis Bastide passing with his hoop. Louis Bastide had come up the rue Clignancourt from the corner of the rue Ordener, running all the way. The slope was very steep. Horses had to take it at a walk ; and they pulled their loads up in jerks, straining for all they were worth and striking sparks out of the stones. One day little Louis had been there when a fire-engine with magnificent horses arrived at a gallop and attacked the slope. A few yards up the hill, they had to slow down like everybody else.

So it was obviously very difficult to roll a hoop up such a slope. It needed plenty of enthusiasm and stout-heartedness at the beginning ; and then a determination not to weaken, not to give way to your tiredness – to say nothing of great skill in handling your stick.

When he got out of school, Louis Bastide had gone straight home to his parents, who lived in the rue Duhesme, on the third floor, quite near the boulevard Ornano. He kissed his mother and showed her his copy-books and the report on his work and conduct. He did not ask for anything, but his eyes shone. His mother looked at his pale little cheeks and at the fine sun outside ; and she tried not to let him see how pleased she was that he wanted to go out and play.

“All right,” she said, “take your hoop. Mind the traffic. Be home by five o’clock.”

The hoop was big and substantial – too big for Louis’s

size. But he had chosen it himself after mature consideration. Long before buying it he had seen it in the window of a bazaar, and he had said to himself that nobody could want a finer hoop – perhaps because of the strong, healthy look of the wood, whose colour was clear and whose joints were well fitted. You had only to look at it to realise how it would run and jump.

Its dimensions had given him something to think about. But Louis expected to go on growing for some years yet ; and he could not imagine that a hoop of which he got very fond might some day cease to be dear to him and simply strike him as a child's trivial toy. His only reason for ever discarding it would be its getting too small for him. In choosing a rather big one, Louis was taking thought for the future.

He went down the stairs, with the hoop hanging from his shoulder. Once he was out in the street, he stood it in the middle of the pavement, very straight up, holding it lightly with the fingers of his left hand. Then he gave it a smart tap. The hoop rolled away. The end of the stick caught up with it at once, keeping it in the right direction ; and after that Bastide and his hoop had run one after the other ; rather like a child running after a dog that he has on a leash ; and also rather like a rider who lets himself be carried along by his horse, but at the same time keeps on spurring and guiding him.

When you have played for a long time with a hoop, as Louis Bastide had done, and you have had the luck to find one of which you are very fond, you come to realise that things are quite different from going out in the ordinary way. Try and run by yourself ; you will be tired in a few minutes. With a hoop, you can keep tiredness at bay indefinitely. You feel as though you were holding on to something, almost as though you were being carried along. If you happen to feel tired for a moment, it seems as though the hoop imparted strength to you in a friendly kind of way.

Besides, you don't have to run fast all the time. If you

know how to do it, you can go almost at a walking pace. The trouble is to keep the hoop from falling to the right or left ; or clinging to the legs of a passer-by, who struggles like a rat in a trap ; or lying down flat on the ground after going through extraordinary contortions. You must know how to use your stick, how to give the hoop very gentle taps, just as though you were stroking it and helping it on its way. Above all, in between your taps, you must keep control over any tendency of the hoop to waver, with the help of your stick, which must just graze the edge of it on one side or the other all the time, keeping it on the move or changing its speed, with the end of the stick held ready to intervene quickly at any point where the hoop threatens to fall into a lurch.

Louis Bastide need not have kept all these details in his mind, for he had been playing with the hoop for a long time, and he had become skilled enough in handling it to trust to most of his actions being automatic. But there was a background of conscientiousness, of thoroughness in him which prevented him from doing anything in the least important without taking pains over it. Nor could he help taking pains even over his pleasures. Once he was interested in anything, he applied himself to it passionately, and the smallest details struck him with pulsating clearness, with a sharpness which made every one of them something unforgettable.

He was born to be a man with the utmost presence of mind. But his capacity for taking pains did not prevent him from taking fire. If his control of the hoop never ceased for a moment to be an operation of scientific exactitude, performed in a sphere of pitiless clarity, his running through the streets became an adventure luxuriant and mysterious, whose connecting thread resembled that of dreams, and whose inexplicable ups and downs led him little by little, and turn by turn, to moments of enthusiasm, or of intoxication, or of a melancholy in itself uplifting.

Once he had crossed the boulevard, he followed the rue Championnet. It was, at that time, a rather out-of-the-way

street, still full of whiteness and brightness. There were scarcely any tall houses. There were low, long buildings, opening on inside courtyards, with nothing but a window or a peep-hole in a door looking out on the street now and then. It was a street with gateways, with fences. A street whose habitual silence was broken only by the occasional rumbling passing of a three-horse dray.

The pavement was bright, and wide enough ; and also it was empty. The long wall which ran on your right accompanied you like a comrade. There were only three or four lamp-posts between you and the next crossing. All this street was full of easiness, of security, of mute benevolence. The sky above it was spacious. The smoke of a factory, in the distance, emerged almost pure white and displayed itself to the right of the tall chimney like a banner floating in the breeze.

Happy the child of Paris who had the run of this quiet street. He could see the sky and the smoke. The sky, still blue and sunny, told you, all the same, that night was coming. It bent down over the roofs of the sheds, and so it came quite close to you. But away there where the smoke was, it was glorious, deep, distant.

That beloved sky, towards which your eyes kept straying, which you kept on finding from time to time – this evening it was like your idea of the future. It did not promise anything, but it contained, somehow or other, all kinds of promises which the heart of a child of Paris could divine. It reminded him of certain hazy but still remembered happinesses that he had known when he was still quite small, still more of a child than he was now, that were already a part of his memory, even while he was running behind his hoop, that were already his own personal, incomparable, secret past.

How lovely that smoke was ! A quite regular series of puffs that rolled up and then spread out. Something like those magnificent clouds of summer, but with a will of their own, an aim of their own, an aspiration of their own. They conveyed to you the idea of a spring ; and then that chimney,

which you could see sticking out of the city — it was as though the source of the clouds, coming to birth in the depths of Paris, had been borne up there into the sky.

Sometimes the hoop took it into its head to run away. The end of the stick pursued it without succeeding in catching up with it ; and the hoop leant over a little, it veered about. It behaved just like an animal which loses its head as it runs. You must know how to catch up with it not too impatiently. Otherwise you ran the risk of running it up against a wall or of knocking it over.

When the time came to leave the pavement and cross the street, it was a delight to wait for the hoop's little leap and watch over it. It was exactly as though you were dealing with a sensitive, nervous beast. And afterwards, until it reached the opposite pavement, it never stopped leaping on the stones, in their cracks, with all kinds of capricious irregularities and changes of direction.

Louis Bastide pretended that he had a mission to accomplish. Somebody had commissioned him to follow a certain course, to carry something, or perhaps to herald something. But the itinerary was not easy. He had to keep to it, respecting all its unexpectedness, all its oddness, both because this was a law and also because there were dangers and enemies to be avoided.

Here was the immense wall of the goods station, and the rue des Poissonniers, whose gas-lamps were so strange. They had a crown, like kings ; a halo, like martyrs. Louis's mission demanded that he should turn to the left, across the street, and go towards the fortifications, following the long wall and passing underneath those strange gas-lamps.

The day was declining a little. The street was beginning to be filled with bluish shadows and with an almost cold air. The sky remained luminous, but it was farther away. There was no further question of the promises that it might hold for a boy who raised his eyes. Louis slowed down to a little running step, very regular, scarcely faster than the walk of a grown-up. The hoop visibly helped him. That

kind of slender wheel, which could run so fast, slackened its pace so as not to tire Bastide. At this rate he could keep on going to the other end of Paris.

The bridge over the Ceinture railway, encircling the city. What had his mission to say? That he should not cross it, but turn to the left along the rue Béliard.

The rue Béliard reminded you of a road running out into the country. Far away, in the provinces, there must be many a road like this, where travellers and coaches passed along at the fall of day. Louis remembered an engraving in a school-book; and also a picture in a postal almanac; and, most of all, a drawing in an old catalogue of the Magasins du Bon Marché.

It was fine to have got as far away as this. The houses at the side of the road looked at you with astonishment. They all looked at your face and said to themselves: "How tired he must be!" But they were wrong if they imagined that Louis had come there for their benefit. His goal was far beyond, and he must get there before night, "before night overtook him," as the books said.

The most that Louis would do was to call a brief halt here. The courier would not even dismount from his horse. He would let his beast go slowly, quite slowly; and as he passed the trough, he would let him drink a little. If anybody questioned him, he would make no reply; or he would content himself with "evasive words."

Thus his gallant little horse, so faithful to its master, recovered its breath. It was better not to pay any attention to the cutting of the Ceinture railway, which lay to the right. Otherwise, the spell would be broken. Unless, indeed, you thought of mountains. In mountain country the railway, penetrating any number of tunnels, made its way to a village. Once a day at the most, the mountaineers watched for the arrival of the train.

In the inn, which was that shed surrounded by a bank, opposite the cut, people were drinking and playing cards as they waited. They might be hunters who had come down from the mountains. They had not come down to take the

train ; for nothing in the world would they leave their own country-side ; but, still, they were waiting.

Louis imagined himself going into the inn for a moment. He left his hoop outside, leaning against the wall ; but he kept his stick in his hand, just as you keep your whip. " A glass of wine, sir ? " " Yes, but I won't sit down, because I haven't time. . . . Good health ! . . . Is it freezing in the mountains ? " " Yes, they say that right at the top the pass is covered with snow. But you'll get through, if you don't let the night overtake you."

The courier set out on his way again. Here began the road that ran up into the mountains, that led to the pass blocked by snow.

How fine it was, a street that went up straight in front of you and ended far away in the sky ! This one was particularly fine, because it was never-ending and made you think of a great precipice beyond it. Louis's father called it Clignancourt "*chaussée*," not just "*street*" like the others. Louis did not know why, but he was not surprised that this marvellous street should have a name all to itself.

His mission now was to get to the top of it before he was "*overtaken by the night*" ; higher even than he could see ; right up to the top of the hill of Montmartre. Then it would be his mission to make a kind of reconnaissance by following the end of the rue Lamarck, like a road cut in a rock, from which you could see the whole of Paris across the new gardens.

Long before he reached the slope, there was still a fair distance on level ground, and, since the hoop was bowling along without his touching it, as though the wind were pushing it, Louis imposed a quite moderate pace upon himself. On the other hand, he made a vow not to slacken up the slope until he reached the pass "*blocked by snow*." After that he would be free to proceed as he chose. He would have left the road. He would be on paths where it was permissible and even prudent to dismount.

But that was still a very long way off ! Bastide needed

all his courage, and also all his skill. He resisted the temptation to go fast. He approached the dangerous street-crossings carefully. His mother had warned him to mind the traffic. Louis had no desire to be killed ; but his mother's despair if he were killed frightened him even more than the idea of death. The stretcher being carried upstairs ; " My little Louis ! My poor little boy ! " The wreck of the hoop, which they might put with his body ; the stick, which he might still clasp in his hand.

Still, it is difficult to evade a law which you have laid down for yourself. Cross the boulevard Ornano with his hoop hanging from his shoulder – that was something which Louis could not bring himself to do. He even had a feeling that he would be punished in some way or other if he did. The laws which you lay down for yourself, or, rather, the orders which come to you from some mysterious depths in yourself, will not suffer you to infringe them or play tricks with them. You risk much less in disobeying a visible master.

Louis had the right to stop, he and his hoop, the one supporting the other. But so long as the course was not finished, the hoop must not leave the ground, must not cease to be in contact with the ground ; for if it did, he would cease to be " true " to himself.

The rue Marcadet in its turn was successfully negotiated. The long climb began. Louis, who knew very little about any other neighbourhood, thought that in the whole of Paris there could not be any slope which it was more honourable to conquer. He who was capable of scaling it, without the hoop that he guided falling down or running away, need not be dismayed anywhere.

But the passers-by lacked brains. If they understood the value of the test, they would not hesitate about getting out of the way, instead of making those annoyed faces, or looking at the boy with contemptuous pity.

So it was that Louis Bastide came to the half-way house of the rue Custine. He saw Clanricard and saluted him

hastily, raising his hand to his *béret*. The master was looking the other way. Bastide, very fond of him as he was, could not possibly stop. The private law which he had formulated for himself at the bottom of the slope required that he should reach the "pass blocked by snow" without a halt. He would have liked to be able to explain to his master that he was not imposing such an effort on himself just for fun.

So he kept his stride and did not allow himself to take breath until he was at the top of the street.

After that it was almost a rest. Louis had the right to go up the rue Muller at walking pace. To help his hoop to keep its balance, he could even support it gently with his left hand, with the tips of his fingers grazing the edge of the wood. On mountain paths the most skilful horseman dismounts and, taking his horse, however good he may be, by the bridle, guides him and helps him not to stumble. All this was within the rules.

When he reached the bottom of the rue Sainte-Marie, he asked himself whether he should go up the street itself or up the steps. He chose the steps. The other way was much longer and offered no opportunity of picking up new threads of adventure. So far as going up a flight of steps like this with a hoop was concerned, the rule to be followed was self-evident. While Louis himself used the steps, keeping as far over to the left as possible, the hoop made use of the granite curb. He helped it with stick and hand. It was a delicate manœuvre, the more so in that the principal rôle developed upon the left hand. The hoop might escape you and hop backwards ; in a series of hops it might run away altogether and go and get smashed under a carriage. But, to avert such a misfortune, it sufficed to be very careful—in other words, to be very fond of your hoop.

As he climbed up the steps, Louis met a keener air, less tainted with darkness. The cliff of houses on his right rose in successive surges, following the rhythm of the steps, and at its peak still received a slanting but dazzling light.

The windows of the upper floors were still burning with reflections. Without stirring from their rooms women could watch the sunset.

And the boy wanted to raise himself up faster, as though up there, on the cornice of the hill, were all the joy, all the games, all the adventures of the future. The very noise of Paris passed into his body, though he was not aware of listening to it. Up with you, nimble hoop ! Trains whistled in the suburbs in the plain. The child of the low streets recognised their cries without noticing them, as though he had been born among sea-birds. Roofs innumerable creaked in the wind ; their creakings and cracklings sounded above the rustle of the leaves in the precipitous gardens. Like all these noises, the hoop, too, bounded and mounted. The child of Paris, as he stopped to take breath, drank in a sound of destinies that came to him from everywhere.

INTRODUCING PARIS AT FIVE  
O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

WHEN Louis Bastide finally found himself in the rue Lamarck, run-out, trembling with tiredness, his heart beating too fast, his hoop close up against him – he was leaning on it, tucked under his armpit, and he could feel the pliant wood yielding under him – the darkness was beginning to emerge out of all the density, through all the fissures, of the most thickly populated city in the world. Midway between earth and sky the elements of twilight merged into one another little by little, as the murmurs of a crowd do ; and if, away up there, the silver and gold light of October 6th still sang, it was only to itself. Paris had ceased to listen to it.

Outside the porch of the Sacré-Cœur Church, provincials, foreigners, new arrivals, watched Paris being submerged by the waves of darkness and had her monuments pointed out to them. Others, far away, were leaving the dome of the Panthéon, the towers of Notre-Dame ; or found themselves belated on the stairs of the Eiffel Tower, chilled to the bone with wind and void. From the balcony of his studio in the rue Caulaincourt, one artist watched the northern suburbs foundering, with their factories, their columns of smoke, the white puffs of locomotives as far away as the slopes of Pierrefitte. Another, through a dirty, cracked window, on the top floor of an old house on the left bank, enjoyed a very remarkable view of chimney-pots and gable-ends.

Knife-board omnibuses passed one another on the

Pont-Neuf. Leaning out of her window, Germaine Baader watched Gurau, who had stayed late with her, going away. To her left the roofs of the Louvre were still shining. The Seine wafted up a dank, cold breath to her. Germaine dreamed of kings and favourites; of palaces, prisons, and drowned men; of the paths to power which are stamped hard by men and upon which pretty women take their walks.

In the centre of the city the mass movements of evening, those long ascensions towards the north and towards the east, like an interminable drawing of breath, were barely beginning. Activity had deserted the inside of the Bourse and the banks and was diminishing on the floors of business buildings, but only to increase and thicken in the streets. The shops were lighting up. The noise of the capital curled itself into knots. In the rue Lamarck, Louis Bastide, insinuating his hoop between fussy visitors to Paris and hawkers of medallions, was on the run again—a child coming down to merge once more into the mass of the city, where night was sparkling into birth.

Sirens hooted. The station clocks pointed to five o'clock. Four, seven, eleven express trains were on their way to Paris. The four which were creeping along far away had barely emerged from the provinces. They had just left the last big cities which Paris allows to grow at a certain distance away from her. They stake out around her a circle which is like the shape of her shadow. As soon as you enter it, impalpably Paris has begun.

Three other expresses, much nearer, were crossing the countryside—impregnated with Paris and subject to her, but still beautiful, in the slanting rays of the russet sun. They were just reaching the second circle—the one which is drawn, a dozen leagues away from Notre-Dame, by the chief towns of the old land of Ile-de-France.

The four expresses which ran ahead of the others were already approaching the inner suburbs, slowing down as they plunged into them. One was coming from Lyons, another from Lille, a third from Bordeaux, and a fourth from Amsterdam.

Part of the centre of the city was beginning to relax. A brisk stream of vehicles was flowing towards the west, and a continuous swarming of pedestrians filled all the arteries which lead from the Place de la Concorde to the Bastille. It was the hour when the proportion of wealthy people in the streets is the highest; when the big shops, with their pitiless lights, are full of women; when women seem everywhere happier and more numerous than men; when, in the churches, there is a faint murmur of prayers by candlelight alone; and when the children of the poorer quarters chase one another shouting along the pavements.

In the Métro stations travellers, with one ear cocked for the approaching rumble of a train, were studying the map, looking for a street. Others, when they saw them doing so, noticed the map and looked at it too. For the first time, perhaps, they realised what the shape of the city was like, and really thought about it. They were surprised to discover which way such-and-such a boulevard ran, how big such-and-such a district was.

Cab-drivers and taxi-drivers were picking up fares and listening to the names of streets hitherto unknown to them. Then Paris unfolded in their heads, in their whole consciousness – a tangible Paris, made up of lines that were alive, of distances which were something that you actually felt; a Paris soaked with movement like a sponge and distorted by the perpetual flux of things that approached and receded. Suddenly, in this Paris which they identified with themselves, a street stung them somewhere quite definite, and they went after it as though it were an itch.

In the offices of the Prefecture, at the end of slatternly corridors, men in sleeve-guards were adding up births, cases of diphtheria, accidents caused by horse-drawn vehicles and by motor-vehicles, square yards of asphalt roadway, hundredweights of meat on the hoof, Métro tickets reckoned by station and by line, net costs of passenger miles. They bent like anatomists over a bloodless Paris, and sliced long strips of figures off her.

The people in the eleven expresses were thinking about

Paris. Those who knew her already saw before them street-turnings, homes, faces; rehearsed how they were going to act, what they were going to do, what they were going to say in definite circumstances; lay down in advance in beds where sleep awaited them in a certain fashion. The new-comers interrogated themselves, put questions to the country outside the windows, to their baggage, to the stations that flitted past, to the round light in the compartment, to the faces of silent fellow-travellers. Uneasily they recalled, they marshalled, all their preconceived ideas about Paris. They invented imaginary settings for people whom they knew. They endowed names that somebody had scribbled for them on a scrap of paper with voices, faces, bodily presences.

On the outskirts of Paris, speculators in building plots tramped in the mud of unfinished roads, raised their heads to fix the direction of north and south by the light of the setting sun, cast an eye over an old woman passing by, a lamp-post, the corner café; listened to the rumbling of an omnibus; sniffed the wind, as though the future were going to whisper to them.

A pedlar of laces and pencils, abandoning the Porte Saint-Denis district, went down the boulevard Sébastopol towards the Châtelet and the Hôtel de Ville, as though an instinct, like that of a fish, conveyed to him that certain waters were more or less favourable according to the time of day. Pickpockets, still more sensitive to shiftings of the shoal, devoted themselves to similar migrations; and prostitutes, who have no such caprices, dutifully set out to take up their posts in the line of the lust patrol.

Meanwhile schoolboys in classrooms, chewing their penholders and running their hands through their hair, watched the last rays of daylight being chased by the gas-light over the shining surface of big maps. They could see the whole of France, and Paris stuck like a fat, slimy blob on the forty-eighth parallel, and making it bend under its weight. They could see Paris, funnily tied on to its river, held there by a stopper, cornered like a pearl on a twisted thread. You felt like untwisting the thread, and letting Paris slide

upstream to the junction with the Marne, or downstream, as far as possible towards the sea.

Elsewhere, in a hotel room, in a clot of the crowd, in a compartment in an express, there was somebody who thought, just for a moment, about the shape or about the sheer size of Paris. Somebody groped in his memory for a figure, drew comparisons, was surprised. One or two people consulted note-books, guide-books. Visitors who had looked at Paris from the top of a tower, as they came down the spiral staircase again, estimated the extent of this horizon where everything was human. Others, who had come from abroad, asked themselves : " Are there going to be more people here than in the Underground ? " " Am I going to be more jostled about than when I try to walk along Cheapside ? "

But the schoolboys had turned their eyes towards the map of Europe. They could still see France – see her, quite obviously, like something curvetting, almost rearing, ahead of the Continent ; but at the same time something tucked away a little, something precious, something protected by more exposed salients. Asia and Europe turned their backs on each other ; Asia streamed away towards the West ; Europe was a march towards the Occident. Paris, reduced to a point, set too high for the convenience of France, seemed to be situated at a spot chosen by Europe.

Less well placed for the provinces of France than for the nations of Europe ; less well placed for the safeguarding of any of them than for the meeting of all of them, Paris gave her name to the destined site of a world capital. Even her remoteness from the sea was, from this point of view, something that pleased the eyes. A capital on the coast always seems too far outside, too vulnerable, too much at the mercy of comings and goings by sea, too wide open to its traffic. To protect the heart of the West, you needed that thickness of French soil.

And during this time, among the last visitors to the towers and the high places, more than one, contemplating the real

Paris under its October evening, thought that it looked like a kind of lake. A bend of the Seine had overflowed, had spread itself just as the ground allowed it. But, instead of water, there were three million people.

As a matter of fact, men had, indeed, replaced the prehistoric water. Many centuries after it had withdrawn, they had begun a similar overflowing. They had spread themselves in the same hollows, pushed out in the same directions. It was down there, towards Saint-Merri, the Temple, the Hôtel de Ville, towards the Halles, the Innocents' cemetery, and the Opéra, it was in the places where the water had found the greatest difficulty in running away, which had kept on oozing with infiltrations, with subterranean streams, that men also had most completely saturated the soil. The most densely populated and busiest quarters still lay over what had once been marsh.

Like the overflowing of the water, the overflowing of people had followed depressions in the surface, circumvented and avoided obstacles, and slowly spread as far as it could up the beds of valleys. But at the same time the human flood had spontaneous movements of its own, apparently capricious, and acted in obedience to tendencies which were foreign to the water. Sometimes it defied the law of gravity. After behaving like a lake, just when, like a lake, it had found its own level and might be expected to lapse into stagnation, it had proceeded to behave like a mouldy soil or like herbage. It had attached itself to certain slopes, crept up them, seemed attracted by the summits, and covered them little by little.

So it was that Paris, very gently, had climbed up her hills. Not only had she spread herself at an increasing distance from her river, but she had even forgotten it. The shape of its valley no longer controlled hers, or if it did, it was with the addition of more mysterious laws. To explain the growth of the city, it did not even suffice any more to think of it as a vegetal growth. You had to bring human eyes to bear on the site, to look up at the heights, to realise how the lie of the land worked on the mind.

The hill of Montmartre had represented, for centuries, a very visible goal, set away to the north, almost provocative. For a city that was still young, it was difficult to resist the temptation to reach it—at the beginning by pilgrimages, by Sunday walks. Little by little taverns spread out along the road to it. A string of houses linked the gate of Paris with the wine-shops in the gardens on the hill, and with the mills whence donkeys carried you along its paths.

When the basilica of the Sacré-Cœur began to rear itself aloft, enormous, bulging in all directions, made of a marvelously white stone in order to catch and diffuse all the light that was available above the mist and the smoke, it was more than a thousand years since Paris had dreamed of installing herself up there and marking her occupation by some trophy which could be seen from the other end of the plain of the Ile-de-France, as the trophy of La Turbie may be seen from ships at sea.

It was at this trophy of the conquest of Montmartre that the people standing in the corridors of the Lille express were looking. They had passed Surveilliers. The train, at a hundred and twenty kilometres an hour, was running down the gentle slope that leads to Saint-Denis. They had already put on their overcoats and taken their baggage down from the racks. But their eyes satiated themselves with the hugeness of the church, and they experienced a fearful pride in the fact that Paris should have devised this imposing way of watching their arrival.

It was at this trophy of Montmartre that the farm labourer was looking as he came on his bicycle from the fields along the road from Gonesse to Le Tremblay. He had some difficulty in keeping the soles of his boots, thick with clay, on the pedals. But when he sat down in a tavern a little later, the horizon of Montmartre would not have vanished from his mind altogether. The room, the tables, the glasses would take on a little of that pomp, that glory, which invest the leisure of the Parisian working man.

Within the same radius, Paris had not found any similar goal presented to her. Mont Valérien was too far away. It still remained so in 1908. It had never succeeded in inspiring anything more than ideas of military defence or an excursion right out into the country.

But between east and north-east one of the oldest extensions of Paris had long since encountered the first slopes of Ménilmontant-Belleville. In this direction there was no beckoning summit, no goal that you were moved to conquer and put your mark upon. The plain rose gently ; then the slope became steeper and finally abrupt. A long spur of hill, rocky in places, led up to a very wide plateau, where you had only to advance a little to forget Paris and see nothing but the semi-country undulations that rolled away towards the east. The city had attacked this slope slowly. It had pushed its houses forward almost in line over a front a league long, with some outposts just a little advanced along the roads that led to the old suburbs or along miniature ravines, and with checks to the advance where it encountered an escarpment.

To the south of the river the Sainte-Geneviève hill, incorporated in Paris since ancient times, had served as a stage for her growth, a new point of departure. On this quite close eminence the human mass, not yet very vigorous, had seized as a means of pulling itself up in order to be able to spread farther afterwards. It had thus gained the level of the long upper plain which stretches away towards Montrouge ; and it had only had to drop down a little to invade the whole of the left bank of the Seine as far as Grenelle.

Towards the west and the north-west another rising plain had let itself be won, little by little. In this direction, too, there was no goal to attain ; none of those natural sites whose mere appearance provokes the growth of a city. There was not even a limit, an impressive boundary of the horizon, as there was to the east. There was simply a reserve of space, an outlet, a simple solution which seemed to repeat itself indefinitely. For about the next bend of the

Seine and the hills that partly followed it Paris did not even think. They were situated outside her future.

Feeling the cold, Germaine Baader left her window. Mlle Bernardine de Saint-Papoul furtively made her way into a little chapel hidden at the end of a courtyard. In the boulevard Barbès, Clanricard, walking slowly, shocked at himself, and depressed, was gradually recovering from the intoxication which the spectacle of force had produced in him. At Puteaux, M. de Champcenais was finding conversation with Bertrand difficult. He told him about the impression he had had when he crossed the bridge. Bertrand paid no attention to it. His own workers were not on strike. What was the good of tormenting yourself about vague menaces, of which society was full? Their business was to put Bertrand Oil on the market.

Quinette looked at his clock on the wall and stopped working. He had only just time to tidy himself up a bit, shut up his shop, and hurry to the rendezvous. In the rue Montmartre the group of idlers had grown a little. Now that night had fallen and the light came from the inside, they assumed a still more curious appearance in the eyes of the painters. Their expression was serious, intense, eager. It was as though it were an event of capital importance, whose consequences you could not estimate all at once, that they contemplated the desperate flinging away of boots by the green-faced Alfred.

Gurau arrived at the office of his paper. They showed him a dispatch: "Belgrade. The announcement of the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria has provoked great excitement here. A great national meeting has been organised for three o'clock this afternoon. The King has ordered the recall of reservists of the first class and of the auxiliary services."

The expresses coming from Boulogne, from Clermont-Ferrand, from Belfort, had passed without stopping, and with a rush of air against the windows, through the county towns of the Ile-de-France: prosperous towns, markets of

the wheat country, good fatteners of burghers and beasts ; sureties for the old lands which have kept their race and their tongue. Paris, which tolerates them and makes use of them, has prevented them, for the past ten centuries, from exceeding a certain standard : a hundred streets, five hundred leading citizens, ten thousand homes.

Then, from each one of the expresses, people who were on their way to Paris for the first time perceived fairly tall houses, well-built streets, a tramway, church spires and towers. They asked themselves whether this was Paris already, and looked at their watches.

"The first time," reflected Jerphanion, sitting in his coach from Saint-Étienne, "I arrived at dawn. I was asleep. I saw nothing. No, I certainly didn't think the approaches to Paris were like this. What did I imagine ? Ramparts standing out sharply. An immense plain all around – not very fertile, not very countrified, but at least open. Great roads leading from the other end of France, bordered by houses for the last few kilometres. I didn't allow for the factories. I couldn't have imagined the suburbs.

"It's a most astonishing thing, a most exciting, thrilling thing – this way that Paris has of announcing herself such a long way off by this swarming of houses. The country disappears little by little, in bits ; or, rather, it's crushed, disposed of, just as though it were passed through a crushing-mill with finer and finer teeth. More and more inexplicable houses. Inexplicable because, in themselves, they have no reason for existence in this particular place. They're just a manifestation of Paris – not to diminish the surprise of her, but to deepen it. A city as big as this really is a different country, a different century. I'm going to change the period I'm living in. I can't expect enough warnings to be able to do it gradually. What a strange thing it is, a suburb ! "

Into these suburbs the expresses plunged one after another as though into an undergrowth. The travellers saw the houses grow taller and closer together ; the roads converge and change into streets. It seemed to the new arrivals as though the motion that carried them along themselves

corresponded with everything else; as though this increasing density were Paris assembling herself, like scattered clouds driven by the wind into a cyclone, like soldiers marching towards the sound of gun-fire, or like crowds flocking from far and wide, along the roads and across the fields, to a fête. They had the feeling that, thanks to the train, they were being given an advantage in this general thronging together, that they were getting some ranks ahead. But further ahead the crowd must be denser than ever, positively stifling. Everybody you left behind you would press up upon you in his turn and push you towards a centre which must be as frightfully compressed as that of the earth itself.

But those who were returning to Paris, or had had occasion to live there, felt that this agglomeration was rather a superabundant substance overflowing and expanding. They saw the houses and the streets, far from trooping towards a point of assembly, rather trying to escape, looking for outlets, getting away as far as they could in the direction of open country. The sense of shoving came from the direction of Paris, communicated itself outwards through the ring of fortifications, piled up against the resistant suburbs, and seemed to seek to thwart the advance of the train.

For Paris, that city set on its river and its hills, had not had to deal merely with the geography of her site. She had been, ever since her foundation, a place warlike and walled. The idea of defence, which ran absolutely counter to the idea of expansion, had always contributed towards dictating her contour. So long as a fortified zone existed, Paris, as she grew, was driven in upon herself, assumed an abnormal density, stifled her people, compressed all her urban organs to the limit of inconvenience. She had to reabsorb to no profit, or even at the cost of her organism's health, certain skin eruptions induced by an urge towards growth which would normally have enabled her to expand and develop in favourable conditions. So she had to deny herself the call of one springtide after another, choke down the yearnings of her youth over and over again. The fortifications that

imprisoned her always gave way in the end, but always too late, leaving Paris a legacy of irremediable twisting out of shape, of stiffening into knots, and of habits of putting up with semi-suffocation that nothing could correct.

But, above all, every time that Paris escaped from her prison of fortifications, she ran up against the villages. She was rather surprised and disconcerted whenever she did ; for, though she had not forgotten their existence, she had omitted to take account of it in her dreams of the future.

Although she had very early been a fortified town, she had never had exclusive possession of her own countryside. Villages as old as herself had grown, or vegetated, there on their own resources, every one of them in its own dip of a valley, on its own spur of a hill, or on its own miniature mountain. All the countryside round about was encumbered with them. There was no freedom in any direction. Every outlet was bound to run up, sooner or later, against some existing community or other, and end in somebody else's patrimony, in a thicket of ancient rights. When the last stones of her own walls fell down, Paris would find in front of her a countryside belonging to somebody else, with its roads strongly held, a disputed horizon.

The last ring of fortifications, the one constructed when Thiers was President, the farthest afield and the strongest of all, with its talus, its moat, its glacis, and the five hundred metres of military zone which protected it, seemed to have surmounted the problem, and still leave something to spare. It enveloped the Paris of 1846 only at a considerable distance, enclosing together with her, apart from a dozen villages, or parts of villages, fields, gardens, deep quarries, open meadows – in short, enough rural space to convey the illusion that you could live on it long enough to withstand a siege indefinitely. This new fortified zone did not so much seem to confine Paris as to indicate a future scope to her and summon her to it. It was at the outset, and until the end of the century, a space left free for her to fill.

By 1908 she had filled it. Paris had finally come to the end of her internal countryside. Goats no longer grazed on the

edges of the rue Caulaincourt. Drovers of cattle were deserting the pastures of the Buttes-Chaumont and going into exile outside the fortifications, in the direction of Romainville. The Bièvre valley was despoiling its gardens to make room for a main sewer. The chalk ravines, the clay meadows had sunk to the standing of building plots. Right up against a stray poplar which persisted in growing on a hillock, you could see the grey-brown palisade of the city asserting its right to climb. A lamp-post had already taken up its position there. In the evening, at that hour when the leaves tremble, its little light flickered its challenge to the sky.

The captured villages, which bore such pretty names – Clignancourt, Charonne, Grenelle – had suffered a rash of dreary greyish jerry-building to slip in between them, a growth of houses, as sad as it was sudden, which soldered them one to another, smothered them in the same dough, and then ate them away, split them up, cut them to the quick by sappings and minings. The old village square, which still preserved its gables, its inn, its church, suddenly found itself rammed, just as the bow of a steamer looms up among sailing ships, by the edge of a towering building, with all the weight of a solid mass behind it.

So the fortified zone of 1846, after serving the city as its outpost protection, had imposed upon it the very form it had to take. Once more, in its turn, it weighed upon Paris and prevented her from developing naturally. Again she had to abandon any hope of finding her own shape for herself. The line of ramparts thwarted the impulse of her new quarters towards expansion, blocked her outlets, cut them off from extending, and left many of the streets on her outer periphery no better than blind alleys, thieves' kitchens, the breeding-ground of rascals and refuse.

Progressively the pressure extended towards the centre. The streets of the older quarters lost any hope of being widened. The old middle-class dwellings and shops were no longer pulled down, and degenerated where they stood into purulent lodging-houses. Their rooms blackened in

a stagnant atmosphere that ended by becoming as stale as themselves.

It was the line of fortifications that, despite its distance away, crowded families into them and made people sleep one against another in folding-beds, even on mattresses on the floor, in former dining-rooms with low ceilings, in kitchens, in passages, in holes with no windows. It was the fortifications that drove builders to construct narrow houses on odds and ends of building plots that faced the wrong way round ; that, little by little, by sheer crushing, eliminated inside gardens, and courtyards planted with shrubs ; that increased the density of the traffic, started slowing it down, and, even on the main boulevards, squeezed vehicles into files with their wheels close together.

As for the villages, the fortifications had, it was true, snapped up some of them and thus condemned them to dissolution sooner or later. But the rest of them, those that were left outside, found themselves protected and left at liberty for three-quarters of a century. No sudden expansion of Paris could now touch them. They had time to grow. Hamlets became villages, and villages large towns. They appropriated the country round about them and organised it in their own way, to meet their own needs, in accordance with the short views of villagers and the limited ambitions of small districts. They employed this three-quarters of a century in twisting and entangling their streets, lanes, and blind alleys to such an extent that nobody could ever untwist and disentangle them again. They constructed boulevards three hundred yards long which ended up against a factory wall. They pushed out towards the country avenues planted with hop-poles, which merged a little way off into a back-ground of cabbages and slag-heaps.

Nevertheless they felt the neighbourhood of Paris. They effected an exchange of people with her, which became a more rapid and complicated coming and going from one year to the next. The fortifications prevented Paris from getting out, but they let the Parisians escape. They went and made homes for themselves in that space outside, where

they had been for walks on Sundays and which, when they were back in the middle of Paris, they represented to themselves as an inexhaustible sequence of rustic dwellings, woods, valleys, and gardens. For the first time, hundreds of thousands of men were to be seen working all day long in a city where they did not live.

But the city got back at them in many ways. Their uprooted wives came to do their shopping in the centre of the city and to warm, at the glow of brightly lit windows, eyes which had looked all the week at a muddy lane where night fell quickly.

Simultaneously new suburbs came to birth outside the fortifications. Unlike the villages, they had no tradition of descent, not the least trace of nobility. They did not contain that "perfumed and melancholy" heart which you end by finding in Bagnolet, in Gentilly, in Châtillon, that little parcel of provincial fragrance in which the market and the church are wrapped up. They rose straight up out of kitchen gardens, building plots, municipal refuse-dumps. In between the older districts they obtruded themselves. They filled the intervals that remained free with jerry-built factories and a rash of mean dwellings. The town hall, the church, the office of a tramway company, a shoe-polish factory, differed only in the details of their architecture. The sole flight of municipal fancy was the practice-scaffolding put up for the benefit of the firemen. It gave a village effect to the bleak public square shoved in between the cemetery and the gas-works. Mothers took their little children to play in what had once been a meadow, alongside a factory wall made of lath and plaster, where the sun shone sometimes.

The air you breathed was never plain, insipid air. Day and night it had a tang about it. It came to you seasoned with subtle, fugitive chemical products, which Sundays scarcely rarefied. You could taste it on your tongue; it impregnated you through and through with the flavours of its fine, acrid spices. It went quite well in your head with certain thoughts, such as the difficulty of being happy, or with complicated cares about love and work.

Meanwhile right up against the fortifications, all round their circumference, an extraordinary swarm of people had developed and more or less settled down – a membrane of population barely half a kilometre thick, but stretched out thirty-six kilometres long; a kind of ring-shaped city stuck on to the other city and living on its leavings. The military zone, upon which the building of houses was prohibited, tolerated hovels and huts. A horde of irregulars, of nomads, of broken men, of immigrants looking for jobs, had taken advantage of the fact to establish themselves there, to dig themselves into the clay, a filthy, furtive, still semi-floating population, but one which, little by little, saturated the ground with habits, traditions, rights. They were a new race of gypsies, apparently malleable as the lime on the carapace of the rampart, but in fact as tenacious as a disease, who would keep on resisting dislodgment even if the rampart itself gave way.

In short, among all the capitals of the world, the Paris of 1908 had no parallel in her situation and her structure. Hemmed in by her fortifications, she found herself also hampered by the litter in her military zone and blockaded by her suburbs. And these suburbs, far from being something simple, something with which you could deal, something spread out in circles, a series of concentric waves of population, formed the most confused jumble – layers of the older suburbs, unequal and broken up; enormous urban nuclei; tortuous old villages; a countryside slashed to bits – all these obeying contradictory impulses, constantly getting in one another's way, and of such a nature that any attempt at expansion had to assume the character of strife and dislocation among them.

Yet it was in this Paris, already threatened with suffocation, that traffic was then attaining the highest speed which had ever been known. Human fluidity as a whole, collective agility, was reaching a momentary maximum. The same causes which had produced it were to compromise it in its development.

Cabs went faster than before, thanks to rubber tyres, paving of a new type, more frequently repaired, and the better condition of the horses. Motor-cars, though they were fast enough, were not yet numerous enough to get tangled up every other minute in their own throng. Bicycles could still be ridden without danger, and thousands of pedestrians had tripled their speed by becoming cyclists. The motor-buses diminished by a good third the time taken by the horse-buses, though these had already reached the point of crossing Paris, from Clignancourt to the Place Saint-Jacques, in less than fifty minutes. The motor-buses were quicker in starting and better at climbing the slopes, numerous in this city of hills.

The electric tram-cars and the surviving compressed-air or steam cars found long stretches of free road in front of them. All these vehicles need scarcely do more than count on their fixed stops. General stops, ordered by whistle or signal, did not yet hold traffic up every couple of hundred yards. The first Métro lines offered direct itineraries between important points. No complicated system as yet presented the temptation to get where you wanted to go at all costs, as though it were a game to work out subterranean twistings and turnings, at the risk of wandering for ever in the criss-cross corridors of junction stations.

The pavements in the centre of the city were congested ; certain main streets were choked with vehicles ; several crossings were dangerous. But a Parisian used to crowds, to traffic, and to choosing his streets could still go for long walks at a steady pace and even without taking much care. Generally speaking, the abundance of means of transportation had not yet given more than three million people the somewhat dizzying idea that they could move about just as they liked and that distance was the last thing that counted.

Clerks and workmen, with the exception of those who toyed with the rather wild – and disillusioning – dream of a little country cottage outside the walls, still devoted a good deal of patience to discovering somewhere to live near their work or somewhere to work near their homes. Public

vehicles were not full of people living in Javel who went to Épinettes to earn their living, or inhabitants of Épinettes who went to Javel for the same purpose. A poor woman did not cross half Paris to buy a spool of thread at the Samaritaine. A rich woman still endeavoured to arrange her shopping and her calls on her friends in accordance with the old rules which aimed at saving distance.

Besides, despite the abundance of vehicles in the principal streets, Paris was still, over whole areas, a city of pedestrians. In many a street the passing of a cab made people pull back their curtains. The ringing of a horse's hoofs, the rumble of four wheels, filled the street from one end to the other – a rather out-of-the-way event that left you dreaming, or waiting. One met people strolling about everywhere. Children played tag from one pavement to the other. Louis Bastide was able to roll his hoop for an hour's journey. Strolling musicians and blind singers kept to the middle of the pavement. The idea of walking along reading a book was not preposterous.

The eleven expresses were bringing to the six principal stations, parcel by parcel, rich and poor, business men and clerks, people of leisure, soldiers on leave, commercial travellers coming back from a trip, foreigners who wanted to see the capital in the autumn; Belgians, Italians, and Spaniards who hoped to find jobs; women who had been to bury an uncle in the provinces; ladies of easy virtue who had been to seek their fortune in the summer resorts, and whom some affair with an officer had prevented from returning earlier to the lights of the haunts of pleasure.

An hour before, they had all been merely people going to Paris. But little by little their goals had become more closely specified. One district of Paris was no longer to be confused with another. They stood out distinctly, separate from one another, each one making itself recognised on its own account by such-and-such a traveller, like people waiting at the exit from a station platform.

The rich districts of the west and on the left bank

beckoned to the rich. A commercial traveller told himself that he would have time to call at his employer's in the rue d'Aboukir before going on to his home near the Cours de Vincennes. A country gentleman and his family, friends of the Saint-Papouls, on their way back from their estate in Périgord, thought about an apartment in Passy, on the third floor of a rather dark staircase, with a double door of painted oak. (Its long passages smelt of dust. The girls' rooms looked out on the garden. The leaves were turning yellow.) A pretty prostitute tried to get a little sleep, in order to pluck up her courage to walk her beat around the promenade at the Folies-Bergère that very night.

Jerphanion thought of the Panthéon, of the rue d'Ulm, of a dark building standing among trees. The Écoles quarter, with its cafés, its cook-shops, and its rather thin girls, made signs to the students; the eighth district, with its restaurants and hotels *de luxe*, to the foreign tourists; Saint-Sulpice to the country priests; the Goutte-d'Or to the Belgians who were coming to work on the railway.

Other travellers knew that they would no sooner have crossed the line of fortifications in one direction before they would have to cross it again in the opposite direction in a tram-car or a suburban train. Their goal was somewhere in these very suburbs which the express was hastily traversing. They felt like saying: "But here we are!" – hanging on to a house which they could see passing and which might be their own; putting the brakes on this train, which was going to make them cover so much of the same ground over again.

So, one after the other, the eleven expresses brought to Paris people who were already distributed in advance.

And Paris, awaiting them under this October twilight – Paris opened out like a hand bearing the marks of mysterious powers, criss-crossed with contrary influences, furrowed with secret lines, which the eyes of no visitor had perceived from the top of her monuments, which appeared on no map, which no traveller in the trains would find mentioned

in his guide-book, but which dictated, even from a distance, attractions and repulsions, and in accordance with which all kinds of individual choices, decisions whereon destinies depended, were being made every moment.

Each one of these lines began at some point on the periphery, or a little further inside ; continued towards the centre in its own peculiar way, insinuating itself between districts or cutting them in two ; made curves and bends and unfurled itself again, crossed other lines and seemed wedded to them for a moment ; and came to rest at the other end of Paris or, on the contrary, returned to its starting-point.

There was the line of wealth, which ran like a restless, debatable frontier – often pushed forward or drawn back, continually skirted or crossed by a coming and going of neutrals or fugitives – between the two halves of Paris, each oriented towards its own pole : the pole of wealth, which for the past century has been slowly moving from the Madeleine towards the Étoile ; the pole of poverty, whose pallid emanations, whose green and glacial aurora, oscillated at that time from the rue Rébeval to the rue Julien-Lacroix.

There was the line of business, which resembled a pocket turned inside out, or a cow's stomach attached to the line of fortifications to the north-east and hanging down far enough to touch the river. It was in this pocket that the forces of trade and speculation jostled one another, heated one another, made one another ferment.

There was the line of physical love, which did not, like the line of wealth, separate Paris into two halves with contrary signs, and did not either, like the line of business, assume the swollen shape of a sack. It formed rather a kind of smear. It marked the phosphorescent course of physical love across Paris, with ramifications here and there, and backwaters or wide, stagnant overflowings. It resembled the Milky Way.

There was the line of work, the line of thought, the line of pleasure. . . . But it suffices to have divined a few of these mysterious markings in the twilight. They will reveal themselves more clearly later on, to eyes trained to decipher them.

By this time all the shops were lit up. The first flames of the lamp-posts flickered at the corners. Children playing on the pavements of quiet neighbourhoods shouted more loudly, as though to counterbalance the sense of solitude that came with the dark. The Lyons express, populous as a village, drew into the station with steady puffings of steam. At the gates of racecourses charabancs were picking up punters. Newsboys set off from the rue Montmartre, with Europe's sentence under their arms.

The weariness of five o'clock in the evening, which had crept along furtively, made itself suddenly felt by thousands upon thousands of men, getting them in the small of their backs, in their chests, in the region of their hearts, like a cowardly stab. Abruptly they experienced a dizzying sensation that life was going on without them. They felt a sudden need of a cigarette, a drink, lights. Adulterous women glided into hidden chambers. Others again, with movements almost as secret, went into churches and noiselessly made their way to the corner set apart for prayer, where a few candles burned.

Further signs heralded the great pulsation of evening. It was to correspond with that of the morning, repeat it in the opposite direction, round off the daily exchange between the centre and the circumference.

Where was the centre at that time ? What were its limits ? How was it to be recognised ? Everybody believed that he knew it, and perhaps was in fact familiar with it, but still had only a vague idea about it.

To the north of the river, almost in the middle of the city, was a deep jungle of narrow, short streets, which were choked with men and vehicles from morning till night. But this characteristic of density, of fullness, of urban plethora, did not suffice to delimit the centre. It was to be found in too many places. It repeated itself, ramifying throughout the mass of Paris, along avenues, boulevards, former Main Streets, even as far as the approaches to the

circumference, and forming nuclei of overcrowding, streaks of over-population, fountain-heads of animation, which were in themselves as warm, as swarming, as the heart of a town.

As a matter of fact, what marked the centre was its pulsation. What marked it was the way in which movement rained upon it in the morning ; the points where this rain of movement fell, the places where it accumulated daily. What marked it was the way in which the suburbs, the circumference, shot more than a million people in practically converging directions at it.

It defined itself, therefore, in the shape of a kind of spongy mass, whose capacity for absorption seemed endless. It lay from west to east, within one-kilometre range of the river. Fairly narrow towards the west, it spread itself, rounded itself out, at the other end. On one side it reached the Opéra ; on the other, the old Temple market. Its most voluminous part, the part that absorbed the most people, located its swelling between the rue Réaumur, opposite the Bourse, and the rue de Paradis.

But in the evening this spongy mass disgorged the million people who had saturated it. It expelled them back to the circumference, to the inner and outer suburbs, in myriads whose movements were all uniform.

It was a pulsation which in no way resembled that of a human organism. It involved no dilation, no contraction. The city palpitated like a focus of radiation which turns back upon itself. To launch all this human material in alternating directions, the centre did not need to budge. If it had to bestir itself, it was not in the hard-working way that a living heart has to do — a heart that in turn, and without respite, distends and contracts, inhales and exhales, and for which no operation is sufficient to itself. It was rather in the imperious fashion of those physical organisms, apparently immobile and inert, which, by their mere presence, modify a whole sphere of the world around them, letting loose, and at the same time controlling, forces, tendencies, radiations in it.

## THE RENDEZVOUS

EVER since four o'clock

Quinette had been continually tempted to walk down to the nearest corner and buy an evening paper. But he resisted this temptation ; both because he did not like to leave his shop, and because he did not want to do anything which might strike his neighbours as being in the least out of the way ; and also, perhaps, by way of schooling his impatience.

His preparations for going out took a little longer than he had expected. He devoted unusual care to them. Never had he been so particular about seeing that he was all in order, not forgetting his electric belt ; that everything was in its right place in his various pockets ; that his shop was properly closed up and locked up.

It was twelve minutes past five before he was out in the street. (His watch was always regulated with extreme exactitude. He even went so far as to adjust his minute-hand into accordance with the second-hand.)

" Here I am, late already," he said to himself. " Stupid of me. Still, whether I'm late or not . . . "

When he reached the Métro station, he bought a paper ; but he did not open it until he was in the train. A hasty, preliminary glance at it did not disclose what he was looking for. He looked over the paper again more slowly. Nothing on the front page. It was true that the political news took up nearly the whole of it. Nothing in the last-minute news. He scanned the rest of the paper, column by column. There was no important local news. A train in collision at

Corbeil. A few accidents. A suicide. Two burglaries – but without violence – one in the eighth district, the other in the boulevard Pereire. However hard you tried, it was impossible to connect them with the stranger's visit. In the rue de Rivoli a dangerous escaped convict had been arrested. He was thirty-three. That would be about his visitor's age. But there was nothing about the escaped convict's having committed any crime whatever that very morning.

Quinette folded the paper up again. He was disappointed. But he had read this local news, trivial as it was, with quite a novel interest. In the matter of the arrest of the runaway, and in that of the two burglaries, he had adopted, without noticing it, a point of view unusual to him. He had said to himself : “ What a silly idea, going and walking in the rue de Rivoli, in broad daylight, when the police are after you ! ” Then : “ So apparently descriptions are worth something after all.” Then : “ Is it true, as people say, that criminals are scarcely ever found by the police themselves – that they are given away by informers, especially women ? Then, if they were more careful – above all, about having anything to do with women – they would never be caught, would they ? ”

“ It's all very well,” he remarked to himself in parenthesis, “ for authorities to say that sexual frigidity is a sign of inferiority. But, in certain cases, what a source of strength it is when you possess it, and what a source of weakness when you don't ! ” He continued : “ When a burglar has made a successful haul, how can you tell how long he will keep quiet – even if he takes the trouble to hide ? ”

He came back to the main problem.

“ When did the ‘ deed ’ take place ? This very morning, unquestionably ; and a very short time before he burst into my shop. Say, a quarter of an hour before. . . . No, I'm wrong there. He left the spot a quarter of an hour before ; but the ‘ deed ’ may have taken place much earlier. He may have spent some time with his victim. To rob her, if it was a case of robbery. To await a favourable moment for getting away. Or to get rid of certain clues. . . . Not very likely, that ; for his first step would be to clean himself up.

" Anyway, that's not the question. He came to my place about half-past nine. I must have been the first person who knew, or suspected, that something had happened. Yet at noon, when I made my little round, the neighbourhood had heard nothing at all. Nor had the police, either, almost certainly. Otherwise there would have been police turning up, and the examining magistrate ; inquiries and all the rest of it ; a stir in the streets. So it's quite natural that the papers, which go to press probably about one o'clock, or two o'clock, should say nothing about it."

The silence of the Press was no disproof, so far, of the reality of the " deed." This reasoning comforted Quinette, who had been on the point of feeling rather bitter about things.

But then he had to deal with another unpleasant idea.

" He won't be at the rendezvous. In fact, I must have been a fool to imagine for a moment that he would be there."

He went over the scenario of his visit to the police inspector again and made improvements in it. He succeeded in polishing up his little speech. And what about the description ? He must have that prepared, too, if only to show the police that he was a man with a sense of responsibility, who might take his time before making a move of that kind, but at least, when he had made up his mind, did not worry people to no purpose.

" This fellow, inspector, struck me as being about thirty to thirty-five. He was of medium height — that is, about my own height. Build ? — oh, quite ordinary — neither fat nor thin. The colour of his hair — Be careful, now ! I was thinking of saying ' quite ordinary ' again. That wouldn't sound as though I were serious. Can I still see his face before me ? Yes, in the sense that I should recognise it. But how is one to describe it ? Had he a moustache ? Yes, I think so. I wouldn't swear to it ; but I think so. Not much of a one, in any case. His eyes ? I didn't notice their colour. Perhaps I haven't much of a gift of observation. Besides, after all, I was upset. The police, I suppose, must have a method of

their own when they look at anybody. A kind of questionnaire in their own minds ; and they put down every reply in its right place.

"Still, when I told him that I should not have much difficulty about giving a description of him, 'which would not be far wrong,' I remember noticing two or three things. Yes, a kind of pouch under the eyes, a hollow running some little way down, and rather bluish. Yes, his skin was fine. And of course I can see his moustache, now I think of it – on the fair side, and a little, just a little, straggling, without much hair in it. His hair certainly wasn't fair – not as light as his moustache. Brown, let's say. Oh, and I also noticed a cleft right at the point of his chin – almost like a gimlet hole. He needed a shave, of course.

"In any case, it wasn't so much the details that struck me. Whereas the kind of face he had, the way he looked at me, even the tone of his voice – I have all that perfectly fixed in my mind. But how can you convey that ? You would have to be at one and the same time an artist, a writer, and even an actor. Still, the essential thing is for me to give the police inspector an impression of good faith and good will."

He imagined the inspector listening intently, nodding his head, taking notes, and little by little conceiving a respect for the bookbinder, for his perfect elocution, for the evident sincerity of his statements, and for the clarity, sense of proportion, and carefulness with which he made them. What a difference from the average witness, who either confined himself to vague generalities out of which you could make nothing, or provided a superabundance of detail which you were sure he was making up as he went along !

The bookbinder, who refused to be browbeaten by public opinion, was, on the other hand, very appreciative of such marks of consideration as he received from distinguished people, and especially from people in positions of authority. He was pleased enough if a police-sergeant or a customs officer spoke to him with a special shade of politeness ; but

the higher the man's position in the hierarchy, the keener was his pleasure. He would have made a good courtier. It was one of his weaknesses.

As he thought things over, he had several times looked at his watch. When he reached the Bastille, it was already 5.49. Might it not be better if he went the rest of the way on foot? He ran the risk of losing several minutes in changing trains. But, without quite being able to explain why, Quinette found it preferable to avoid a long walk down the rue Saint-Antoine which might make him conspicuous. He emerged from under the ground at the Saint-Paul station, quite close to the rendezvous. While he was waiting for the train, he had verified the position of the rue Malher and the rue de Turenne on the map.

The Saint-Paul station clock pointed to 5.55. Five minutes late. Suppose the man had come, though reluctantly, and had taken advantage of Quinette's being a little late to consider himself absolved from his promise? Quinette, who was a punctual man, reproached himself.

The rue Malher was directly opposite the station. The rue de Turenne ought to be the third turning to the right. Quinette started walking slowly along the north pavement towards it.

Darkness had almost completely fallen. In the distance, in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville, there was still a bluish patch in the sky. The lights in the windows of the shops, which were plentiful and all close together in this district, lit up the pavement brightly, though slantwise, and with contrasting, capricious shadows which made the passers-by less easy to scrutinise than you would have thought at first sight.

Quinette reached the corner of the rue de Turenne without seeing his man. He paused for a moment, peering along the street. A few shadows flitted from lamp-post to lamp-post. He went back on his tracks.

Could his attention have wandered for an instant? Suddenly, a couple of yards in front of him and to the right, he saw a man walking along with a parcel under his arm. It was his visitor of that morning.

"He's even brought the parcel. Just as I told him. It's extraordinary."

The man half-turned around, glanced at Quinette, and, with an almost imperceptible movement of his shoulder, signalled to him to keep on following him.

He turned down the first street to the right, which was very short. He crossed over to the other side. From time to time he glanced back, beyond Quinette, as though to make sure that nobody was following the two of them.

They reached a building which proved to be a covered market. The man, turning to the left, walked all around it. Its front presented rather strange ornamentation. A lamp lit up the head of a bull, clumsily sculptured. You might have thought yourself on the threshold of the temple of some barbaric religion.

After two more turns, they found themselves in a very narrow street, some fifty yards long, which was absolutely deserted. The man stopped, but, with a gesture of his hand, indicated that Quinette was not to join him yet.

"Evidently he's suspicious. He wants to make sure that I have not brought the police with me."

Their zigzag walk recommenced. They reached the Place des Vosges. The man walked almost the whole way around it, keeping under the arcades. The square was empty. One could have heard a footstep, even in the distance. Besides, you had the impression that, in case of alarm, the pillars of the arcades, and even the doorways of some houses, would provide the man with shelters in the shadow, momentarily hiding-places, which would enable him to baffle any pursuers and make good his escape.

"He's certainly giving me some exercise. I wonder whether he's making a fool of me," Quinette said to himself. But, on the other hand, he participated eagerly in his companion's anxiety. "After all, he has reason to be suspicious; and what he's doing is not so silly as it looks. Suppose I had come for the purpose of handing him over to the police, and that they were dogging our footsteps,

waiting their opportunity to arrest him. Well, I don't see how they could manage to trail us around this square, where you can hear every sound, without giving themselves away."

Quinette was following four or five paces behind. Suddenly the man threw at him, in a hollow voice :

"Not so close ! "

A little farther on, he repeated, almost in exasperation :

"Not so close, I tell you ! "

Quinette dropped back until there were a dozen yards between them. Henceforth he had to pay more attention as he followed. The man might disappear round a corner, or dive suddenly into a doorway. Quinette's anxiety prevented him from continuing to notice the names of the streets. The stranger made several more turns and for a moment appeared to have lost his way. (But perhaps, in pretending to hesitate, in going back on his tracks, he was only aiming once more at making sure that Quinette was the only man walking behind him.)

Finally he stopped in front of a shop, narrow and old, which looked like a wine-shop. An ancient grating of wrought iron protected the shop-front. Through thick curtains a faint light came from inside.

"In here," he said.

It was difficult to guess whether he had chosen this place in advance or had decided upon it all at once.

The room ran far back. A partial partition, glass at the top, divided it into two. In the front part several men, oddly dressed, in a way at once poverty-stricken and respectable, which made them look like retired clerks who had come down in the world, were sitting around a big table covered with ancient oilcloth. The man who appeared to be the proprietor wore a bowler hat, a jacket, and a long beard.

Quinette followed the stranger into the back part of the room. The proprietor, standing on a cane-bottomed chair, lit a gas lamp.

"Give us - I don't know—— What do you want to

drink at this time of day? They haven't got much. I'm going to have a quetsch. They've got some good stuff."

"I don't mind - I'll have the same," said the bookbinder.

He studied his companion furtively. He wanted to verify the description which he had built up out of memory in the Métro.

"Yes, there's the cleft in his chin. His moustache is bushier and darker than I thought. Why, he's got a big wart on his left cheek! I ought to have noticed that. He's had a shave since this morning. His eyes are grey. His nose is round at the end, and rather snub. He uses hair-oil. Perhaps he hadn't any on this morning. His hair grows straight across his forehead. His ears are rather prominent. . . . Is he wearing the same clothes? They look newer to me."

"What are you looking at me like that for?" asked the other.

"Oh, nothing - I mean to say - you remind me of somebody I know well. But I can't think who it is. You know that kind of impression one has."

There was a silence. The man had a wary air about him, but he was by no means dejected.

"I've brought you here because it's quiet, you see? These people are Yids; they only just understand French. In any case, there's no risk of meeting a 'tec here. . . . He'd be spotted as soon as he came in. . . . You're not a Jew, are you?"

"No."

"I asked you because you wear a beard. But, of course, that's no reason."

There was another silence.

"Tell me - why were you so anxious to see me again?"

"I told you."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"I thought that perhaps you wanted to give me away."

"Oh! . . ."

". . . Not that I imagined you belonged to the police

yourself. Of course not. But there are so many people who, though they don't belong to them, are in touch with them. I very nearly didn't come."

"Still, you have come."

"I'd promised."

They sipped their quetsch. The man went on, in a very low voice :

"In any case, you can't give me away any more now."

"Oh, and why not? Bear in mind that I don't want to in the least. But why not?"

"That's quite easy to grasp. You would be an accessory."

"What do you mean?"

"Look here. You let me into your place this morning. If one tried hard enough, one could certainly find somebody who saw me going in or coming out. And now we're meeting here. Suppose I'm arrested to-night or to-morrow? What's to stop me from telling the judge that we fixed this business up between us? A fifty-fifty split. Or even that we shared up here, this evening? These Yids would bear me out."

"But——" said Quinette, rather taken aback; "you must admit that you might be arrested without my having anything to do with it. You wouldn't be so mean as to denounce me for nothing?"

The other sneered.

"What proof am I going to have that you'd nothing to do with it?"

"It would be a dirty trick . . . a breach of faith . . ."

"You don't want to run any risk, eh?"

"I'm running quite enough risk as it is. And what am I getting out of it?"

"I offered you money."

"And did I want to take your money? No, I didn't. You've no right to say things that aren't true. . . . And to think that I was simply trying to do you a good turn!"

"Not this evening."

"What do you know about it? . . . Even the worst

ruffians are grateful to people who help them out of a mess."

"I'm not a ruffian."

"All the more reason."

Again there was a silence.

"Well, that's reassuring to me," the man resumed. "If you had anything whatever to do with them, directly or indirectly, you wouldn't be so much afraid of being given away."

Quinette asked himself whether he had not rather overdone it – whether the other was not ceasing a little too much to be afraid of him. He ought to have gone more skilfully about graduating the doses of gaining his confidence and intimidating him, without letting either process spoil the effect of the other.

"You're making a mistake," he said. "It wasn't fear that made me speak like that. Go ahead and denounce me if you like. I don't mind. You may be sure of that. But you make me sick with your threats."

"My threats! – my threats! . . . You threatened me enough this morning, if I didn't come."

"Listen to me. I am a man of my word. If I give you my word that I won't denounce you, I might 'belong to the police,' as you put it, a hundred times over, and still I wouldn't denounce you. On the contrary, I would help you to get away from them. See?"

The stranger stared at him, rather disconcerted.

Quinette went on :

"Put it like this : Somebody who belonged to the police, even to the higher ranks of the police, might have a bee in his bonnet. An unfortunate fellow, who has just done something silly, falls into his hands. Instead of crushing him, he protects him. But in return he requires complete trust. That's natural. I'm just imagining a case to help you to grasp my meaning."

The other wrinkled his forehead and tried to see it.

"You needn't rack your brains. I'm just telling you to trust me, and you won't regret it."

"There's something that I still don't understand."

"What is it?"

"What we are doing here this evening."

"What are we doing here? Well, I'm expecting you to tell me everything that happened to you before you came to my place this morning. Everything – you understand?"

Quinette had adopted an authoritative tone. He looked the other straight in the eyes. He tried to bring into play that invisible energy which he was sure his organism had recently been producing in unusual quantity.

The other answered him smoothly.

"You're as curious as all that, are you? Well, why don't you look in the papers, as you told me this morning? It ought to be there."

"It's not there yet."

"Are you quite sure?"

He said these last words with an ambiguous air of mockery which disturbed Quinette.

"Perhaps I didn't look in the right place," he said to himself. "Or I may have bought the wrong paper. Or I may have read something without realising that it applied to him. But still, I don't think so."

This short pause sufficed to make Quinette lose the advantage which he had gained, and the moral hold which he had over the man.

He pulled the paper he had bought out of his pocket and thrust it at him.

"If it's there, show it to me."

The man stopped smiling when he saw the paper. His face clouded and even seemed to become anxious.

"All right, all right," he said, pushing the paper away.

Then he frowned, and spoke almost rudely.

"There's no sense in this. I didn't mind coming this evening, because you insisted, and because you had done me a service. But this is enough of it. I've brought you back your books. I haven't even opened the package. And now leave me alone. I've other things to do, you know. I'll say good-bye, with my best thanks, and there's an end of it."

But he did not dare to look at Quinette. He threw what he had to say at him sideways, trying to make it sound resolute. His lids blinked rapidly over his grey eyes. The pockets underneath them seemed to drink in and diffuse the uneasiness which flowed from them.

On the other side of the partition a conversation in Yiddish was in progress. Quinette turned round to make sure that nobody was paying any attention to them, and satisfied himself once more that there was no door or suspicious opening in the back room. Then he spoke in a very low voice.

"Are you quite sure that the victim is dead?"

The man shuddered, stared at Quinette, and then, shrugging his shoulders, leant his cheek against his hand.

The bookbinder went on :

"You don't think that the neighbours may have heard anything?"

"The neighbours? What neighbours?"

Quinette felt the picture which he had in his head wavering and dissolving – that picture of the little apartment looking out on the courtyard, on the fourth floor. He made an effort to rid himself of any preconceived ideas and let nothing escape him that his man might give away. But how was he going to marshal his own questions, how was he even going to formulate them, without seeing something in his mind – places, actions, people? He clutched at the phrase :

"What neighbours? Exactly. I'm asking you who you think might have overheard, at one time or another."

The man seemed to be repeating the question to himself; then he replied :

"There would have to be some, in the first place, wouldn't there – some neighbours, I mean?"

What did he mean? Quinette saw the "deed" escaping from the district where he had confined it, escaping even outside Paris altogether – situating itself in a solitude of fields and trees. But that made the sequel incomprehensible. A man who had committed a crime in the suburbs did not

rush into a bookbinder's shop in the Vaugirard district to wash off the blood that stained his hands.

"Come, come!" he said; "what are you trying to get away with?"

He emphasised the tone which he had just adopted – the tone of a man who knows more than he says, and asks questions less for the purpose of dragging your secrets from you than for that of verifying his own information or making sure of some point of detail. He added, with the air of a man who throws out a disturbing suggestion:

"Neighbours? There are always neighbours!"

The other looked at him with increased anxiety. Then, as though by way of reassuring himself, he asked:

"If I knocked this chair over, would the people at the other side of the street hear it?"

"If this door here, and their own windows, were shut – no, they wouldn't."

"I mean with everything shut, of course."

"No, they wouldn't hear anything – but are you sure you didn't make any more noise than that? . . ."

"I'm just keeping the thing in proportion. I suggested a chair being knocked over because the people across the street are really quite close."

Quinette turned round and looked towards the street, as though he were comparing the dimensions which he saw with other dimensions that he had in his mind. He closed his right eye, raised his left eyebrow, made a face.

"Yes . . . no doubt. . . . But when you're very intent upon something, you may make more noise than you think, or you may, despite yourself, make a noise without noticing it at all. . . . Suppose I asked you, for example: 'Weren't there any shrieks?' —"

"Shrieks?"

"Yes, shrieks – you might say, perhaps: 'I can assure you there weren't —'"

"I might say, mightn't I, that I have nothing to tell you?"

"But suppose that a neighbour, on one side or the other

heard these shrieks, or even waked up with a start——”

“ You’re giving me the horrors with these stories of yours.”

“ Ah, it’s more important than you think. . . .”

What Quinette was seeing now was a little house like his own, but even more isolated ; people asleep in the neighbourhood, at dawn ; shrieks, suddenly. . . . With an assurance entirely superficial, he added :

“ I repeat : waking up with a start.”

“ And I say : nothing of the kind.”

“ Why not ? Because it was so early ? ”

“ No, not because it was so early. Besides, damn it, you’re not going to make me talk if I don’t want to ! ”

The bookbinder decided that it would be prudent to beat a retreat. In any case, he had carried away a little booty as it was. The picture in his mind was being completed and revised little by little. A little house with no near neighbours, standing in a garden or on waste ground. Somebody all alone. At night, or towards dawn. In any case a time when the people around were asleep. Even so, they might have awakened if there had been much noise. But there had been scarcely any noise. Something knocked over, perhaps. But it was quite likely that the “ somebody all alone ” had not cried out. She had been killed without making a sound. For there was no doubt that she was dead. Several hours must have elapsed between the “ deed ” and the man’s flight. But still, the blood that he had on his hands was quite fresh. In that case——

Quinette took up the thread again, in a tone of voice which he succeeded in making paternal, soothing.

“ The main thing, from your point of view, is that it wasn’t found out right away. Perhaps they haven’t found out about it even now.”

“ Do you really think so ? ”

The man had said that quite excitedly.

“ You have had several hours to throw them off the scent. That’s something. If you’ve known how to make use of them——”

Ng

"Make use of them? . . . In the first place, do you imagine that one can do just what one likes? This morning, when I came to your place, I said to myself that I was making a mistake. But what was I to do, dirty and all as I was? It wasn't even as if I had my head properly screwed on."

"Couldn't you have cleaned yourself up where you were . . . before you left?"

"No. . . . So I had to go and clean myself up wherever I could. That's the curse of it. Every silly thing you do springs from something that you have done before."

"Quite so. But allow me to say," Quinette observed with a rather fatuous patronising air, "that you seem to lack a cool head for dealing with affairs like this. Do you remember the rag that I lent you this morning? I told you to be sure and take it away with you. You left it on my kitchen table."

"What did you do with it?"

"I burnt it. And what about your handkerchief?"

The man seemed to be extremely embarrassed.

"I threw it away, I think."

"You think! Where did you throw it away?"

". . . Down a sewer."

"You're not quite sure about it?"

"In cases like this, you can't be sure of anything you do."

"That's just what I'm complaining about."

Quinette thought it over, and sighed.

"And just imagine that you had the luck to stumble on somebody who, though he had nothing whatever to do with it, was in a better position than you were to sum the situation up, to decide what ought to be done or what ought not to be done – not to mention the personal capacity for thinking things over which you don't find in Tom, Dick, and Harry – yes, indeed, somebody who might have given you advice, warnings; who might have put you on your guard; who might, for all you know, have found the way out for you. . . . But you didn't choose to take advantage of the fact. You didn't trust him. Well, that's your business."

"I didn't trust him because I didn't see why I should.

Will you tell me what interest you have in doing all this ? ”

Quinette was well aware that his behaviour must appear suspicious so long as he failed to produce some simple, comprehensive explanation of it, romantic if need be – people always had a weakness for explanations of that kind – but one which anybody could readily understand. By offering such an explanation he might even find an opportunity of strengthening his prestige.

He whispered :

“ Listen, I’m going to tell you all about it – confidence for confidence. Yes, I used to belong to the police, once ; but I had a frightful row with them. As a matter of fact, I caught one of the chiefs taking bribes. They decided to break me. I had a fine job – not outdoor work, but at headquarters. Naturally, though I hadn’t the experience of an inspector, I picked up quite a number of things, even from the practical point of view – things worth knowing. Well, they played me a dirty trick – one of those dirty tricks you can’t forgive. There you are. I want to get back at them. Whenever I have a chance of keeping anybody out of their claws – so long as he’s somebody who interests me, somebody who attracts me, of course – I do it. Now do you understand ? ”

Apparently the man did. He looked at Quinette quite differently. He glanced for a moment at the parcel, which he had laid on the ground in the corner of the room. He was on the point of saying something, but he changed his mind. He reflected for a moment, and finally he said :

“ Of course, if you can help me – but I don’t see how you can . . . ”

“ Certainly I can. We’ll see just what I can do for you in a moment. But wait – I can at least tell you now whether you have taken all the precautions you should. Where did you go when you left me this morning ? ”

The man hesitated.

“ Did you go home ? ”

“ No. ”

“ Do you live by yourself ? ”

"Yes, I have a room at a hotel. As a matter of fact, I owe them my last week's rent."

"You didn't sleep there last night?"

"No - at least, I left there about eleven o'clock."

"They didn't see you go?"

"I dare say they didn't notice."

"But they must have noticed this morning when they cleaned your room?"

"Not necessarily. In the first place, it's a dirty hole, if you must know. Often they don't do the room until noon or later. And besides——"

"You thought of rumpling up your bedclothes?"

"No."

"That was a mistake - a bad mistake," observed Quinette, with the air of a man who knew what he was talking about.

"It may have been - but wait a minute. A woman came to see me, yesterday evening. The bed must have been more or less upset."

"A woman? Yesterday, of all days?"

"I wanted to see her again, beforehand. I didn't know what might happen to me."

"Did you talk to her about it?"

"No."

"Quite sure you didn't?"

"No, I didn't. She knew that I was hard up. I told her that I might be going away - that a pal of mine had told me about a job in the suburbs."

"You have a regular profession, have you?"

"I'm a printer."

"Oh, are you? We do much the same kind of work. It's a curious coincidence. Ought to bring us together, oughtn't it?"

"Not to mention that it was one reason why I went to your place instead of a grocer's or a coal-merchant's. I noticed your books. Besides, I thought it would be quieter. By the way, though, how did you become a bookbinder without serving your apprenticeship?"

"I had been doing bookbinding for some time, as an

amateur. When I left the police, it gave me the idea of taking it up as a profession. I couldn't turn my hand to just anything. I had to have a more or less liberal profession. But tell me – you haven't seen this woman since ? ”

“ No, no.”

“ You're quite sure ? ”

“ I swear it.”

“ It would be a serious matter if you had.”

“ Oh, she's a fine girl. She wouldn't give me away.”

“ You think so, do you ? You men are all the same. However, we can go back to that. Have you met anybody else ? ”

“ Not a soul.”

“ Have you been back to your own neighbourhood ? ”

The other hesitated.

“ . . . Yes . . . but only in passing. I ate at a little restaurant where I go sometimes.”

“ You didn't have a bigger bill than usual ? ”

“ No. I had a bottle of Bordeaux and a couple of brandies. My bill came to somewhere about six francs twenty-five.”

“ You didn't give any out-of-the-way tip ? ”

“ A franc – one franc twenty-five centimes. I left him the odd change.”

The bookbinder sighed.

“ It was a silly idea to go back there, when there are thousands of restaurants in Paris where you would have been sure to pass unnoticed. But you must have seen people you knew. Didn't you talk to them ? ”

“ No, I didn't. ‘ How d'you do ? ’ and ‘ Good-bye. ’ I didn't pay much attention to them. I didn't attract conversation.”

“ You hadn't too obviously something on your mind ? ”

“ Oh, they're used to seeing me like that. Ever since things have been going wrong. I remember I told the waiter that Paris made me sick, and that I was going to move outside – just the same thing as I told the girl yesterday evening.”

“ You didn't say anything else that might have aroused

suspicion – even after the bottle of wine and the two brandies ? ”

“ Nothing at all.”

“ You didn’t leave anything at your hotel ? ”

“ Yes, a trunk.”

“ And where are you going to stay to-night ? ”

The other made no reply. Quinette scrutinised him.

“ But didn’t you go somewhere to change ? Those aren’t the clothes you were wearing this morning, are they ? ”

“ Yes, except that I bought a jacket.”

“ And what did you do with your old one ? ” The man hesitated about replying again. “ And you’ve had a shave and brushed your hair. You didn’t do that in the street, did you ? ”

“ I went to a barber’s.”

“ Where – in your own neighbourhood ? ”

“ No, a swell barber’s, near the Samaritaine. I’d never been there before.”

“ But what about your jacket ? That’s extremely important, you know, because of the stains on it. Why, for my part, this morning, I didn’t merely burn the rag and pulverise the ashes – I even washed all the places where you had laid it down or let it fall, with disinfectant. Not to speak of the sink and the tap. I suppose you’ve never had anything to do with the police before, have you ? They haven’t got any description of you ? They haven’t taken your finger-prints ? ”

“ No, no.”

“ Tell me quite frankly, because it may make all the difference.”

“ I swear it.”

“ This was the first time that anything like this ever happened to you ? ”

“ Oh – one or two odd jobs, you know. Nothing serious. You mustn’t take me for a professional. I’ve never been pinched.”

“ Your trousers and waistcoat are the ones you were wearing this morning ? And your shirt, too ? ”

"Yes."

"What are you thinking about? You'll have to consider all that. You don't seem to realise the risk you are running. It's the same with your jacket."

"Is that all you're worrying about? My clothes aren't going to get me arrested, if nothing else makes me suspected. And if they do arrest me, it will be because they already know I did it. In any case, my goose will be cooked."

"You're reasoning like a child. It surprises me in a printer – a man who must have a certain amount of education."

"Oh, I haven't got much education. I've been working in quite small places – visiting-cards and announcement-cards mostly. That's even partly why. . . . You lose your job for nothing at all, and then there's all the time you're out of work."

"Well, do you want me to look after you or not?"

Another silence.

"If it's no, I won't hold it against you. You can go to the devil your own way, that's all. Considering how helpless you are, I wouldn't give you two days before you're caught."

The man reflected again; then, picking up the parcel from the floor, he rose to his feet.

"Come along."

"That's my parcel, isn't it? I don't mind carrying it," said the bookbinder. His success made him feel obliging.

"No, no," said the other; and he snatched the parcel out of Quinette's hands.

WAZEMMES MEETS HIS FUTURE

WAZEMMES and his gentleman spent a few moments together between the Prix de l'Oisans race and the Prix de la Drôme.

"Well, did you get my friend Paul?" asked the gentleman.

"Yes, quite all right."

"He wrote down to your dictation? No mistake about it?"

"None whatever. He repeated the names of the horses. He also said to me: 'Tell the boss that I have a hundred francs twice on Nippon II in the Prix de l'Isère. He'll know where that comes from.'"

"All right, thanks. You're an excellent messenger."

Then he excused himself, on the ground that he had to go to the other end of the course, adding that they "must try to find each other again before the end of the meeting." Wazemmes kept his eyes open for him, but did not see him again.

On the platform at the Nord station, as Wazemmes was getting out of the train from Enghien, somebody called him. It was his gentleman.

"You've time to come and have a drink with me, haven't you?"

Wazemmes knew that his comrades would be waiting for him impatiently; but he was not the man to miss an opportunity. Anything out of the way, however trivial it might be, excited him in itself. Besides, he adored cafés,

even though he had not had the means to frequent them much. What tempted him was not the idea of gulping down a glass at a counter, like a drayman with his horses pawing the ground outside. But sitting at a table, with a swell drink in front of him, he would enjoy all kinds of pleasures, including that of having a drink. The glow of alcohol, the tang of aromatic essences, added fuel to the fire of his inborn optimism.

"If it's all the same to you, we'll go to this place just opposite here. It's run by Belgians – almost fellow-countrymen of mine, for I come from the north, quite close to the frontier."

"Oh! my family comes from there, too."

"Where from, exactly?"

"From the Pas-de-Calais. My name is Wazemmes."

"Yes, that's a name that smacks of the district."

Once they were sitting in the café, the gentleman looked Wazemmes over more carefully than he had done before, and with some liking for him. How old was the fellow? Twenty, if you took nothing but his height into account. Barely eighteen, if you studied his face and his eyes as well. But could he be a hardened frequenter of race-tracks at that age?

Conscious of the curiosity with which the other man was looking at him, Wazemmes sipped his apéritif. He was on his best behaviour. He had put on an air of good-mannered innocence. Without hoping for anything in particular, without having any very definite ideas in his head, he wanted to inspire confidence. But he had no intention of being led by the nose blindly. His taste for seizing an opportunity did not make a ninny of him. He was, indeed, quite ready to invent lies, if he found them useful, either for hiding behind them or for putting the best possible face on himself.

"Do you go to the races often?" the gentleman asked him.

"Fairly often."

"I've seen you at Auteuil, haven't I?"

"Yes, among other places."

"Do you bet on your own account?"

"Yes. . . ."

Wazemmes prepared to embark upon a course of lying. He started making up his fashionable life as a young patron of the turf, which he would have no difficulty in describing with a wealth of detail. It would come into his head just as he wanted it. But, greatly to his surprise, he found himself afraid of doing so. It struck him as inevitable that the gentleman would not believe a single word of what he was saying and would acquire a poor opinion of him. That was something Wazemmes dreaded very much.

So he corrected himself :

"But mostly I bet on behalf of my workshop."

"How do you mean?"

"Not every day, but at least three times a week, or even four - it depends on the sports calendar."

He endeavoured to express himself correctly. He avoided any suburban intonation.

"If I understand you, you go and bet on behalf of your comrades in your workshop?"

"That's it."

"Don't you find any difficulty, on account of your age?"

"I can get round that."

"And your employer hasn't anything to say against it? I suppose he bets himself, does he?"

"No, he doesn't bet. It's not that he wouldn't like to, perhaps; but he doesn't bet, all the same, just to make us feel that he doesn't approve of it."

Wazemmes was on the point of adding some careless remark, such as : "We don't mind the boss. The best thing he can do is to keep his mouth shut." But he remembered that the gentleman was himself an employer (M. Paul had called him "the boss" over the telephone); and, apart from the rude way in which he was thinking of putting it, the very spirit of the remark might shock him.

Besides, it struck Wazemmes all at once that for employers in general, and above all for the privilege of being an employer, he felt, and had always felt, considerable

respect. He imagined the day coming when somebody would say over the telephone : " Go and tell your boss, Monsieur Wazemmes . . ." ; and he realised keenly that all the desirable things in life – knowing the secrets of a motor-car, sitting at your ease in a café, lounging about a racecourse with a pretty actress – would recede from or come closer to him, Wazemmes, exactly in proportion as he came closer to or receded from that status of an employer towards which workshop conversation, and the state of mind which it engendered, sometimes led him to feel disrespectful.

So he decided that it was better to strike a more moderate note.

" It's a matter of custom, you know," he said. " The boss can't very well help himself. Of course, he takes advantage of my going out to get me to run errands for him, when he has any."

" So your comrades have no hesitation about trusting their money to you, eh ? Obviously they know that you are a man on whom they can depend. Are there many of them, in your workshop ? "

The question disturbed Wazemmes a little. Might it not be a way of finding out whether he was carrying a good deal of money about him or not ? Wazemmes saw a series of time-honoured confidence tricks parading through his mind : exchange of note-cases, the " hidden treasure " dodge, the " Spanish prisoner " swindle, not to speak of straightforward pocket-picking or one of the various other forms of robbery.

Pocket-picking, robbery, did not seem very likely ; the gentleman had nothing whatever of the highwayman about him. But what about some of the more subtle forms of swindling – some trick which would take you by surprise ? Wazemmes summoned to his rescue everything that he could muster in the way of knowledge of men, of the science of physiognomy. It did not amount to much.

" You don't imagine there are, do you ? " he replied. " Half a dozen of them ; and they haven't much money to risk."

No, without any question, the gentleman wasn't one of those light-fingered gentry who lure away any twenty-franc pieces you may be unlucky enough to have in your pocket. Something in his appearance told you that he was "above that." He might be dangerous ; but, if so, it was in a different kind of way ; and what way it was Wazemmes had no idea.

" And is it just for small bets like that your boss doesn't mind your losing any number of half-days – or pretty nearly full days, isn't it ? – because if you go to Enghien or Le Tremblay . . . What do you do in this workshop of yours ? "

" Painting."

" Oh ! . . . Well, in that case, of course . . . "

The gentleman studied Wazemmes again. Of course, if it was a painters' studio, there was nothing very surprising in this Bohemian way of carrying on business. Even the "boss" himself, presumably some shining light of the Fine Arts school, could not be expected to reprove except as a mere matter of form. Still, the young man had nothing of the arts student about him.

" But – what kind of painting ? "

" Fine decorating, lettering. . . . Nothing but artistic work. The shop has a reputation for it."

" Oh ! I see. . . . "

" The oldest of us, a fellow called Péclet, is very good at it. He does landscapes, people, animals. He could show his stuff, if he chose."

" I see. And you're learning the trade, are you ? "

" Yes."

" Or at least you're supposed to be learning it. Because if you spend your afternoons at the races——"

" In the morning I grind colours. I wash brushes. Sometimes even, I blend colours. It isn't often that they let an apprentice do that. You need a pretty good eye for it."

He stopped for a moment ; then, with the air of a man suddenly shaking off any illusions, he went on :



"Oh well, I'm bound to say that, so far as learning anything goes, it's not much of a job."

"Where's it going to lead you?"

Wazemmes shrugged his shoulders slightly and made a face.

"What kind of a wage does a working painter actually get by the hour?"

"I suppose Péclet is making about one franc twenty-five."

As he named this sum, which suddenly struck him as beneath contempt, Wazemmes realised, more forcibly than ever, that his present lot was utterly unworthy of him.

"Do you like this trade of yours?" the gentleman demanded. "Do you see any future for you in it?"

Did he? A brilliant future indeed! A rosy outlook! When he came to Péclet's age, if he had as much talent, making his twelve francs fifty a day when work was plentiful – and being out of a job for how many weeks when it wasn't! He must have been unpardonably weak to have accepted such a fate, even provisionally; and he had done himself no good in the eyes of his questioner by telling him the truth about it.

So he hastened to declare, stumbling over his words a little:

"Oh, of course I know that it's no profession for me. I just went into it as a stopgap. Besides, I'm too well educated for it."

The gentleman smiled.

"Really? So you've been a student, eh?"

"Of course! I've done a year of extension courses and more than six months at Colbert's. I could have taken my certificate."

"Why didn't you?"

"I lost my parents. I was in the hands of an uncle of mine."

"He couldn't afford to let you go on with your studies?"

"Yes, I believe he could, if he'd liked. But he was a painter himself, you see? He doesn't work much,

nowadays, because of his rheumatism. But he was a friend of my boss. That's how it happened."

He omitted to add that he had gradually got disgusted with a life of study, with its monotony, with its restrictions, with the position of being considered as a schoolboy in which it left you in the eyes of grown-ups. During the four months, precisely, when he had been a student at Colbert's, his keenness had diminished visibly. When his father died, following his mother at a year's interval, he had been the first to insist upon finding a trade for himself. The uncle who had taken him in, and whose savings were not large, saw no good reason why he should sacrifice the tranquillity of his old age to the quite uncertain success of his nephew's studies.

"In any case, you know how to spell, don't you? And you could write letters? With a little practice . . ."

Wazemmes shrugged his shoulders. He was eager to complete his rehabilitation.

"My uncle shoved me into the first job that came along. As long as he got me out of the house and I was making a few coppers . . . Besides, I'm only sixteen."

"Sixteen? You're only sixteen?"

"Yes, sixteen on April 7th."

"You look eighteen at the very least."

"I feel like it, too," added Wazemmes, modestly.

The gentleman seemed to be thinking. Then, after a moment, he went on:

"Perhaps you're not cut out for a completely sedentary job. But a little office work, alternating with plenty of outside work, both calling for a certain amount of initiative, and likely to lead to a future for you — how would you feel about that, eh? What would you say to it, at first sight?"

"I should like it very much. Besides, I'm used to it already."

"Used to what? Oh no! It's nothing to do with racing. As you know, I've been going in for racing lately; but only for want of something better to do. You've heard people talking about the judgment of the Court of Appeal on

March 28th, haven't you? In principle it was favourable to the bookmakers. They hailed it as the beginning of a new era for them. I thought myself that there was money to be made in that direction. As a matter of fact, it has been a good season. There has been a very sharp drop in the takings of the tote – to our advantage, of course.

“But I know, from some sources of information I happen to have, that we must look out for an early attack on us in the Chamber. Sooner or later the bookmakers will be throttled. Besides, it's no profession for me. . . . You see, I'm saying just the same thing as you did yourself. . . . But, unlike you, I have something else up my sleeve. On the other hand, I'm not your age any longer. The time I lose means a hell of a lot more to me. Mind you, I'm not regretting anything. These last six months have enabled me to put by a little money, and also to look around in other directions.

“To come to the point, I'm going to give up bookmaking and strike out in a new line for myself. At the start I don't want to burden myself with a staff or overhead expenses. I'm going to try to do everything myself, with the help of some young fellow who knows his way about.”

With every sentence the gentleman spoke, Wazemmes's delight, his keenness to make a future for himself, his faith in his destiny, swelled a little more. But then he remembered M. Paul, to whom he had spoken over the telephone. His excitement emboldened him to ask :

“You're not keeping Monsieur Paul?”

“What do you know about Monsieur Paul? Oh yes, of course” – and he smiled, as though he were saying to himself that such a question could only come from a fellow who was pretty wide awake. “No, I'm not keeping him. In the first place, he's getting old – can't keep on the trot enough for the job. Besides, he's not adaptable enough, not versatile enough. I shall leave Monsieur Paul to my successor. I want somebody whom I can sack at the end of a couple of months if he doesn't give me satisfaction, without making a tragedy out of it. You see I'm talking

to you quite brutally. With a man of Monsieur Paul's age, one would have to hesitate more about throwing him out into the street."

These last remarks, which were clearly not made at random, certainly sent a slight shiver down Wazemmes's back. But he had too much confidence in himself to imagine that he would be unequal to any job which he liked doing.

Abruptly the gentleman pulled out some money, summoned the waiter, and closed the conversation.

"Well, there it is. Think it over. I'll take you on trial. For the time being, you'll have to do filing and indexing, a little letter-writing, and, above all, errands about Paris—errands which will demand brains and, I repeat, initiative. Not a dull job. A hundred francs a month. At sixteen, that's not bad. I warn you that you won't always get Sundays off. But if things go well, you won't have to ask me to raise your salary; or I might take you into partnership. Take down my address: Monsieur Haverkamp, 21 rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs. Here, let me write it for you. That's my old place of business. I'm moving somewhere better. Where do you work?"

"164 rue Montmartre. . . . If you want a recommendation——"

"I don't care a damn about recommendations. I'll see you on the job. But, as your place is only five minutes away from me, it will be easy for you to send me word. I shall have to have your uncle's consent, of course. . . . See you later."


 THE REFUGE
 

THE man stopped. "Wait a moment," he said.

They had come along the rue de Rambuteau and had reached the corner of the rue Beaubourg. The man looked in all directions, but especially behind them.

At that time the wide and almost straight part of the rue Beaubourg began only at the rue Rambuteau, whence it ran to the rue Réaumur. The first twenty houses in the rue Beaubourg, in the opposite direction, constituted a tortuous alley which insinuated itself into the oldest maze in the Saint-Merri district and joined the rue Brisemiche there. Few parts of Paris had such a furtive, stealthy air about them.

When the man had made sure that nobody was following them, it was in this direction that he turned. He followed the rue Brisemiche and then turned immediately into the rue Taillepain, which at that period was still in existence.

The street, barely three yards wide, formed a right angle. A hanging lamp shed a half-light on the fronts of the very old houses ; but their doorways were left quite in the dark.

The man swung so abruptly into a passage that his companion did not realise the fact for a moment and had to go back on his tracks.

The passage, which was only wide enough for one person, was dark ; but a little light trickled into it through an oval opening set in a recess to the left.

They crossed a little courtyard and found in front of them another passage, very short, in which there were only two doors – one at the end, and one to the left.

The man opened the door on the left, put his parcel on the floor, and drew the curtains. Then he lit a little oil-lamp. The inside of the room was less squalid than one might have expected. There were a wooden bed, about three feet wide, with sheets that looked clean; two tables, one of which bore a basin and a water-pitcher; a jug on the floor; on the other table, a fringed cloth; and two chairs. The tiled floor was partly covered by matting.

They sat down.

"I'm trusting you, you see."

"But - this isn't your hotel?"

"No, of course it isn't."

"Then what is it - your hiding-place?"

"Yes. . . . You can talk quite freely. The room next door is empty."

"What about the window - no risk of being overheard there?"

"No. Besides, I didn't say you could shout at the top of your voice."

"You're going to sleep here?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

Quinette looked around him.

"But - surely this is somebody's private house?"

"Yes, a good woman's."

"Nothing to do with the one you were telling me about just now . . . the lady of last night?"

"No, nothing whatever. . . . You make me laugh."

"What put it into your head to come here?"

"I don't know. I may as well tell you that I've known this neighbourhood for a long time."

"Is it around here that you've been living?"

"No."

"Struck you as a quiet corner, eh? . . . But this woman - how does she come to put you up? She rents this room to you?"

"Yes. She rents these two rooms, this one and the

one next door, when she can find anybody to take them."

"Who recommended you to come here?"

"A fellow who pushes a cart, whom I met in the rue Aubry-le-Boucher. I told him that I was looking for a room, but not in a hotel. Because I often had to work at night, and it was impossible to get a sleep in a hotel in the daytime, with all the coming and going. For that matter, I made inquiries somewhere else - at a bar."

"You didn't call too much attention to yourself, with all these questions of yours?"

"No. Why should I? - there was nothing out of the way about them."

"Wasn't your good woman surprised to see you without any baggage, even a hand-bag?"

"I had the package . . ."

"So it did come in useful, you see."

"Besides, I had another package as well."

Quinette looked for the other parcel out of the corner of his eye. At the moment he could not see it.

"I paid her a week's rent in advance. So you may imagine that she didn't raise any objections."

"Didn't she question you?"

"She's half deaf. I took advantage of that to say something or other to her. When people are like that, they talk just for the sake of hearing somebody talking to them. But they're used to not understanding what you are saying. They don't mind about that."

"But what about your trunk that you left at the hotel?"

"I don't know that I care much about what's in it."

"Perhaps not, but it will give you away. The hotel-keeper might make a statement to the police. And it wouldn't take a great deal——"

"I know. . . . Now that you mention it, there's a matter about which you could do me a service."

"By going and getting your trunk, you mean?"

"Of course I should give you the money to pay what I owe them. Last week, and Sunday, Monday, Tuesday - say, three or at the most four days over."

"But it might be a serious matter for me."

"I'll tell you what would be a good thing; you say that you are my new boss; that I had asked you to pick up my trunk, as you happened to be in the neighbourhood, and that you wanted to inquire about me at the same time. You look just like an employer. You do, really. You look thoroughly respectable. It wouldn't enter their heads that you were anything else. Besides, you know, business people, so long as they get their money - well, they don't worry very much about you."

"Yes, but there might be enquiries afterwards. . . ."

"And what if there were? They would say that a real gentleman, with a fine beard, came to tell them that he had given me a job. What's the matter with that for an alibi?"

"Hold on! - it's not as easy as all that. If they really want to find you, they'll get on the track of the gentleman with the fine beard."

"And suppose they do? Why should they think of you, no matter how exact a description they have of you, eh? A bookbinder working in his own shop? An old crony of their own?"

"I don't say they would think of me. There again, you can see for yourself how useful I can be to you. In this case, just you try to get anybody else to go in my place! . . . But the hotel-keeper might ask me for your address, on the ground that he wanted to forward your letters."

"I never get any."

"That may be; but they might ask for it just out of curiosity; and I don't want to look like trying to hide it from them."

"Give a false address."

"Yes, and then, if there ever are enquiries, my visit to the hotel ceases to be an alibi for you. On the contrary, you strengthen suspicion. I'm speaking in your own interest when I say this."

"Well?"

"Just a minute. I'm thinking. There's another thing.

You don't expect me to carry your trunk on my back ? A taxi ? But, in the first place, I doubt whether one could get into your street here ; and, anyway, what would the neighbours think ? A taxi stopping and setting a passenger down in a street like this ! ”

“ What about an ordinary cab, at night ? ”

“ There's the question of the driver, who would readily forget a fare from the Est station to somewhere on the boulevards ; but his coming to this cut-throat place, and you, and the trunk would stick in his mind for a year or more.”

Quinette fell silent. He looked around him. He listened. Full of an entirely novel sense of watchfulness, whose sharpness nothing had yet blunted, and which the circumstances wherein he found himself made as responsive as it was intense, he tried to assess the value of the place as a refuge, the strength of the secrecy with which it surrounded a man, what degree of danger, what pressure of investigation, it would resist.

You could hear occasional sounds of traffic, fairly far away ; passing footsteps, in the street itself, very much deadened ; sometimes the sound of a voice, which always sounded too close to be comfortable, like a hue and cry coming nearer. The footsteps sounded much more reassuring than the voices. But there were also periods of silence. The house itself seemed mute. The very slight, irregular noises which you could hear from time to time – rustlings, creakings, tappings – might come from an upper floor, but they might equally come from the neighbouring houses. All this region of old walls was so densely populated that noises of this kind might wander about it at random and cease to belong to any one place more than to another, just like the odour of poverty and mildew which the walls sweated everywhere.

Quinette went on :

“ I can see, of course, what you liked about this place. ‘ Who would ever think of looking for me here ? ’ That's what you said to yourself. Unfortunately, the same idea

would come into anybody else's head. It's just as though there were a notice at the entrance to the street through which you took me just now: 'Reserved for people in hiding.' "

" Oh ! but all the same——"

" Besides, places like this are full of prostitutes and bullies. The police always have their eye on them. They have all kinds of informers in them. Your landlady – well, I wouldn't mind betting that she is one."

" You wouldn't say that if you saw her. Shall I invent some pretext for calling her and let you have a look at her ? "

" No, no ! She mustn't have a chance of recognising me. Not at any price. In what neighbourhood was your hotel ? "

" In the rue du Château, in the fourteenth district. Do you know it – a street that runs from the avenue du Maine, just beside the church, to the boulevard de Vaugirard, past the Ouest goods station ? "

" No so far from my place, in short."

" About twenty minutes on foot."

" Not a neighbourhood you can be sure about either. But still, it's better than this one. Mind you, you did right to leave it ; but we shall have to find you something better."

" Oh, you're getting on my nerves ! "

" I'm still thinking about your trunk. There's one thing we might do – go and pay them to-day and tell them that you will come back for the trunk or send for it. There's nothing suspicious in the trunk if it were opened, is there – nothing that might interest the police or put them on the scent ? "

" ... No ... except a number of pairs of brand-new socks, at the bottom. If they found those, they might wonder how I got them. But they wouldn't start looking for me just for that, would they ? "

" No, I don't think so – if that's really all there is. So far as that goes, you might have been setting up as a street sock-seller, at a stall, or with a cart. When no complaint has been made, you know, the police don't go out of their

way to be officious. But the first thing to do is pay these hotel people. After that they won't have anything to think about. They'll just shove the trunk in a corner and forget all about it until you send for it."

"Mind you, I never said that I didn't want the things in it."

"You can get on without them."

"But what advantage do you see in not getting it to-day?"

"This, in the first place – that they will have less reason for asking for your address. Even if you went yourself——"

"What, go myself? Not likely!"

"After all, why shouldn't you? . . . You could say: 'I'm only staying where I am for a night or two. I'll give you my definite address when I get the trunk.' Supposing it's somebody else – myself, for example – who goes, it's even simpler. I am your new employer – that's a good idea of yours. I've come to pay what you owe them – an advance on your wages. More especially, I've come to get a reference about you. Your new address? I don't know it yet. So long as I don't take your trunk away with me, there is no reason why I should give my own address; and I am not bound to know whether you have found a place to live yet."

The man listened to Quinette as a patient listens to a doctor. All he wanted was to believe what he told him and do what he told him. When a patient raises an objection, it is only for the purpose of compelling the doctor to take everything into account and apply his infallible wisdom to all the details of the problem.

Quinette looked at his watch.

"Hallo, nearly seven o'clock! – and we haven't got very far."

He stood up.

"I should very much like to see if there isn't anything in the late evening papers, too."

"No, no!" exclaimed the man excitedly; "no!"

"Why not? Don't be ridiculous."

"Time enough to-morrow morning. I'll look myself then. But I don't want to know now. They're not going to find me here to-night, are they? Very well, then; I want to be left in peace until morning. I want to sleep."

The bookbinder scarcely listened to him. He was thinking aloud.

"Seven o'clock . . . yes . . . wait a minute . . . wait a minute. . . I'm not sure whether I haven't found the right solution. . . I go out first. Yes, that's it. I improve the occasion by seeing how things look around here and whom one meets. I buy a paper – yes, I will; you're not a child. You meet me – let's say at the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, on the raised part in the middle. I'll be walking up and down reading. That's much less suspicious than a street-corner; and, besides, there's more room. Then we'll take the Porte d'Orléans tram-car. We'll get out at the Montrouge church. You know that café there, at the corner of the rue d'Alésia and the avenue, on the left as you go towards the gate?"

"Yes."

"Are you known there?"

"I've never been inside the place."

"There's no risk of your meeting anybody you know there?"

"No – not in that part of the avenue."

"Wait for me there. I'll go to your hotel. I'll pretend to be making inquiries about you – nothing more. You left yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"I can say to them: 'He came along yesterday. He went to work for me this morning.' Perhaps that isn't a cast-iron alibi; but still, it will put it into those people's heads that you can't have been doing anything very much out of the way last night; and if they are questioned later on, they will still have the remains of that idea in their heads, and they will be inclined to add to it on their own account. The more so inasmuch as I shall give them to understand that my business is in the suburbs – the northern suburbs, let's

say. You can see why I choose that direction, and I choose also a very large, very populous district, in case they should go looking for the bearded boss. At the same time, I shall be able to tell at once from the way they answer me whether there has been any alarm already——”

“How can you tell?”

“Of course I can. Let’s suppose the worst: that they are on your track, that inquiries are being made, that the police have already called on your hotel people. I shall guess it at once from something they let drop, some reference they make, the mere looks of them. I shall not press the point, you may be sure. You will see me coming back in a hurry, and then we must consider what to do. It will have been a useful reconnoitring expedition.

“If, on the other hand, they merely say, rather bad-temperedly: ‘Glad to hear he’s got a good job. Hope he’ll remember to pay us,’ I shall reply: ‘As a matter of fact, he intends to call this evening to settle with you and get his trunk.’ And go you will, a quarter of an hour later. We shall be finished with the whole business at once.”

“But they will question me.”

“You can reply as vaguely as you like; for example: ‘It’s Saint-Denis way,’ or simply: ‘In the north of Paris.’ You needn’t say anything more. Or you might say this, which would be better still: ‘I’m not sure whether I shall be staying there. As soon as I’m settled somewhere, I’ll write to you.’”

“What are we going to do with the trunk?”

“The simplest thing will be to take a taxi.”

“But where am I to tell him to go? Here?”

“Let me see. The essential thing is to split up the distance. In the first place, is there anything in your trunk that you don’t want me to see?”

“... No. ... I’ve explained to you about the socks.”

“Because, in that case—listen to me. Tell your taxi-driver to take you to the Montparnasse station, which is quite close. Leave your trunk there. You can give me the receipt. To-morrow morning I’ll go and get the trunk out.

I'll take it to my own place. If you want anything out of it, you can give me the key, and I will bring it to you. When we have found a safer hiding-place than this for you, it will be time enough to take your trunk there. In that way it will have made one trip less, and I defy anybody to trace its itinerary afterwards. Come on. We're wasting time. . . . Shall I take my parcel with me ? ”

The other hesitated. Then he made a helpless little gesture with his hands and burst out :

“ Listen. I'll have to tell you something. I've played you a dirty trick. Yes, I have – after all you've done for me. It's true, of course, that I felt I couldn't be sure of you. As a matter of fact, I suspected you. But all the same . . . ”

Now that he was looking at the parcel more closely, Quinette noticed that it had changed its shape since morning. It was bigger. There were bulges in the paper. The string had lost its symmetry.

“ You've opened it ? . . . You've put something else into it ? ”

The man maintained his pitiable look of contrition. Quinette put the parcel on the chair where he had been sitting and untied it.

“ What will you think of me ? ”

Quinette opened the parcel. On top of the books was a folded jacket – the one the man had been wearing that morning – and when he unfolded it, he found the blood-stained handkerchief inside.

Quinette said nothing for a moment. He bit his lip and gazed at the other contemplatively out of his little, deep-set black eyes. Then he asked :

“ Why did you do that ? ”

“ I don't know. I swear to you I don't know. ”

“ You were going to give the parcel back to me. What did you hope would happen afterwards ? ”

“ It was just a nasty trick – a bad joke, you might call it. ”

“ You wanted your revenge on me, did you ? ”

“ No. At least, I was certainly pretty furious about your forcing me to see you again ; but I didn't want to do you

any harm. No, it wasn't that. I was thinking what a face you would make when you opened the parcel."

"I see."

The bookbinder reflected, stroking his beard.

"I meant to tell you right away," the man went on.

"I was sorry. But I didn't dare."

"I see. . . . Well . . ."

Quinette sighed. Then he said :

"It doesn't seem to have done you much good, anyway. What are you going to do with these things ? "

"I'm going to throw the handkerchief down a sewer, as you told me to."

"And the jacket ? "

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You had better leave it there," said Quinette. "We can see about it afterwards, with the rest of your clothes. You haven't any very noticeable stains on your trousers, have you ? It will be bright in the tram-car, and in the café where you are going to wait for me."

He took up the little oil-lamp, inspected the man carefully, and put it down again.

"I don't see anything very suspicious. We can make a start. I'll go first."

He was no sooner in the passage than he realised that the other, for fear lest Quinette should take revenge on him, might not dare to meet him in the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville. He might lose his head altogether and take flight at random. If he got himself arrested, Quinette would certainly be compromised. He went back again.

"In the square, remember ? In five minutes at the most. . . . Don't trust me, do you ? But happily I'm not so bad as you are."

"You're not going to give me away, to punish me ? "

"I dislike them too much. If I wanted to punish you, I should do it myself. But I'm sure there won't be any second time."

The other looked at him with the anxious obedience of a grudgingly pardoned dog.


 THE LADY IN THE 'BUS
 

WAZEMMES left the workshop, turning over in his pocket the tips he had received from his comrades who had won. Four francs fifty. Péclelet had presented him with a couple of francs on his own account. It was true that Péclelet, who had put fifteen francs on Laripette, found himself twenty-seven francs to the good.

Wazemmes was full of pleasant ideas. His encounter with Haverkamp had opened an extensive vista before him. It was not so much the job that was offered him in itself, or the money attached to it, that occupied his mind. He would think about that part of it later on, when he had talked the matter over with his uncle. What buoyed him up at the moment was that he had received a kind of general assurance of his future and a palpable proof that luck was with him. A young man whom a gentleman of importance and distinction singles out to entrust him with a commission requiring discretion, and to whom he proceeds to stand a drink in a café and suggest their pooling their fortunes, is a young man of parts, who is not going to end up as a house-painter.

He felt like celebrating this success, and blowing his four francs fifty in the process. He began by buying a packet of high-grade cigarettes, which cost eighty centimes. But just as he was going to light one, it struck him that a cigarette, even a high-grade cigarette, did not make an adequate break with the common run of life, and he bought a fifteen-centime cigar. He approached the lighter on the

counter again. But then he said to himself that a cigar before eating would make him sick, and that he would be wiser to be satisfied with a cigarette for the moment. He would smoke his cigar after dinner, while he was talking to his uncle.

When he left the tobacco-shop, he asked himself whether he should take a drink in a café, a taxi home, or both. But the cafés in sight struck him as pretty poor places. To find one that suited his mood, he would have to go to the boulevards, and that would make him too late. As for a taxi, the defect in an indulgence like that, if you were by yourself, was that you had to enjoy it without witnesses. The people in the street had other things to do besides watching you ride by. Of course, there would be his arrival home, the surprise of the man who kept the fruit-shop and the concierge. But an effect like that would be premature. It would be justified if it underlined a change in his circumstances which had already taken place. It did not fit in with a mere hope. If the fruit-dealer and the concierge heard to-morrow that the young man on the third floor was still serving his apprenticeship at daubing in the rue Montmartre, this evening's taxi would make them shrug their shoulders, and they would simply regard Wazemmes as a fellow too big for his boots.

At this moment he saw a J-line 'bus, going towards Montmartre, coming along, and he decided to take it. The stop was only a few yards away.

Besides, motor-buses, which were quite recent, and infrequent as well, still had some prestige about them. Wazemmes specialised in them. He owed them almost all his practical experience of motoring. The reading of a text-book became more alive, once you were familiar with the noise of changing gears, the terrible throbbing of an engine working in low, the shuddering of brakes suddenly applied, the smell of the exhaust.

In view of the circumstances, Wazemmes disdained to ride on top. That meant that he had to sacrifice his cigarette; but he knew that inside he would find a more select public,

mostly feminine; more in keeping, therefore, with his own desire to show off and with the colour of his thoughts – though, indeed, at a rush hour like this, even ordinary working people sometimes rubbed shoulders with first-class people, for lack of seats on top.

The J-line 'buses had not yet introduced the system of zone tickets, which had been in operation for the past three years on the horse-drawn lines. The first-class fare was a flat thirty centimes. Wazemmes fingered a fifty-centime coin and asked himself whether he should not draw attention to himself by giving the conductor ten centimes by way of a tip. It was a thing that he had sometimes seen elderly people do, especially old ladies who counted on the conductor to put them down at the right place and help them out. Coming from an active young man, would such a thing be understood, even by a first-class public?

Wazemmes did not want to make himself look ridiculous. Like all people with a good opinion of themselves, he had his own particular inhibitions of shyness. They applied, in general, to all actions that he imagined were controlled by some code of which he was ignorant. But when he believed, rightly or wrongly, that he knew "the rules," he did not distrust his own sense of the right thing for a moment, and his assurance was something surprising.

He discovered a way of going about the business. When the conductor came along, he asked him, in a loud voice, what time the last 'bus left Montmartre. The question in itself invested him with something of the air of a night-bird. A little later, when he paid his fare, it was easy for him to hand back a ten-centime tip ostentatiously.

Once that matter was out of the way, he devoted himself to the running of the vehicle. He was in luck. This motor-bus ran well. The engine kept up the steady clatter of a machine-gun, without abnormal spluttering. Starts were accompanied by a full-bodied roar, and a dozen seconds later you could hear a crushing noise – like what a locomotive would make in knocking down a brick wall. This was

the shift from low to second speed, which the driver had succeeded in making in one movement.

"Good, very good," thought Wazemmes; "but I'll see how he takes the rise."

Just beyond the rue Montholon, in fact, the slope of the rue Rochechouart steepened sharply. The two most trying rises were on either side of the intersection of the rue Condorcet. Each of these rises was preceded by a stopping-place, which cost the vehicle a loss in impetus. Would they be lucky enough this time to have no passenger to pick up or set down; and would the conductor be able to ring his bell before the driver applied his brakes? This was one of Wazemmes's favourite emotions.

Alas, they had to stop; and, contrary to the hopes which it had inspired, the 'bus's process of starting again was painful. Not only was there no question of changing into second; the driver even had to resort to a manœuvre with which Wazemmes was only too familiar, and which consisted in dropping into low and then jiggling the throttle half backwards and forwards alternately. Wazemmes had searched in vain in *Little Secrets of the Motor-car* for any explanation, or even any mention, of this procedure. But he had seen the J 'bus-drivers resort to it so often on the rises of the rue Rochechouart that this worried pumping movement had become a part of his own reflexes.

He even dreamed about it at night. One of his most persistent nightmares evoked a motor-bus which he had to drive up a very steep slope. However much he might agitate the throttle with skilful slowness, however much he might put all his soul into this coaxing, manipulative movement, the 'bus stalled and began running backwards—whereupon Wazemmes woke up with a start.

The first rise was negotiated. Wazemmes permitted himself to relax a little and, emerging from his technical ecstasy, resumed contact with the people inside the 'bus.

Suddenly he realised that there was a pressure against his right knee and thigh. This pressure did not seem accidental; it must have been repeated several times, but the young

man had been too much absorbed to pay any attention to it.

He looked to his right, and blushed. He had as his neighbour a young lady, about whom he could take in no more than that she was pretty, on the plump side, and fashionably dressed. The lady, out of the corner of her eye, saw him blushing, and she smiled almost imperceptibly.

Wazemmes did not feel at ease. Such an adventure had never happened to him before, and the reveries of one kind or another about love and women in which he had indulged had not prepared him for such a definite situation as this. For the moment his most intense desire was to call back that blush which had escaped him.

By the time he recovered himself, he would not be far from the Place du Delta, where he had to get out. As he left the vehicle, he would look at the lady as gallantly as possible ; and once he was safely out of it, he would have any number of hours in which to remember this marvellous incident. It transfigured his evening in advance. To which of his comrades in the rue Polonceau or the rue des Gardes should he confide it ?

The pressure was renewed. Wazemmes could not see his way very clearly. A sense of unreality, together with feelings of happiness, of pride, of peril, danced in his head. The 'bus surrounded them with a circle of noise. What should he do ? What were the rules ? Not draw away from that pressure, obviously ; rather try to return it, however slightly.

He responded with a very tentative pressure ; and all at once he felt some of his self-assurance coming back to him. He ventured to look at the lady again. She was wearing a large hat, in whose shadow her cheeks looked infinitely voluptuous. He saw two large, shining, deep-set eyes coming at him ; he saw her lashes droop, and a fresh smile descending from her eyes to her mouth, which had rather full and very red lips.

The redness of those lips disturbed Wazemmes. Most women at that time were discreet in their use of lipstick.

But he had no time to ask himself many questions. The Place du Delta was approaching. He must leave his seat and get out on the platform with enough time to spare to avoid making a fool of himself. He had to find – and in what corner of his mind was he going to find it? – just the right expression of his face, of his eyes, to make a favourable impression on the lady.

But the lady got up too, with the most natural movement in the world. Wazemmes felt his heart beating fast and his head swimming again. Decidedly life was asking too many proofs of his worth from him all at once. Rise to the height of circumstances – why not? It was what he was born for; but by one step after another. Otherwise it meant things tumbling over one another in a way that made you giddy.

No sooner had the 'bus left them on the pavement than the lady in the large hat accosted Wazemmes. For that matter, he had been only too sure of what was going to happen to think of trying to make his escape.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I don't generally get out here. To get to where I live, in the rue Ronsard, must I go back along the rue Clignancourt, or isn't there a shorter way of getting there?"

She had a low, laughing voice, rather heavy lids, and, in the curve of her too red lips, when she stopped speaking, an obvious desire to be kissed.

"The rue Ronsard?"

"Yes, you know – those houses below the big garden, opposite that wall of rock – imitation rock?"

"Oh, yes! But you ought to have got out at the rue André-del-Sarte, opposite Dufayel's."

She laughed from deep down in her throat.

"What a tease you are! But you say that as though you were serious! Nice of you!"

The curve of her lips became more eloquent.

"No chance of your offering to show me the way, I suppose? What do they teach you young fellows?"

"Well – they're expecting me at home, madame."

"Expecting you? Really? Then we mustn't let the little fellow be scolded for being late. But isn't the little fellow allowed out after his dinner? Or is he sent to bed as soon as he's finished his dessert?"

Wazemmes blushed again, but this time from humiliation.

"Bah! I stay out till midnight if I want to; and I don't ask anybody's leave."

His shyness deserted him. Nothing exasperated him more than to be treated like a schoolboy. It would not have taken much for him to tell this over-painted lady what he thought of her.

"In that case, will you come and have a cup of tea with me this evening? My windows look out on the garden. It's rather nice. Number 4, rue Ronsard. The fifth floor, on the left. You needn't ask the concierge. Nine o'clock, shall we say? Don't be late."

She stretched out her hand to him.

"That's a promise, isn't it? Aren't you going to answer me? Slow, aren't you?"

"Number 4?"

"Yes, fifth floor, on the left. I'll be looking out for you."

"All right. I'll be there about nine o'clock, or ten past."

She shook his hand with affectionate energy. The curve of her lips counterfeited the budding of a kiss.

"See you later."



WAZEMMES' S IDEAS ABOUT  
WOMEN AND LOVE



WAZEMMES went away without looking back. What he felt most clearly, amid a confused sense of disturbance, was a great satisfaction with himself. Here he was winning the love of women with no more effort than it took him to gain the confidence and the respect of men. This compelled him to recognise, despite any doubts he might have, that he was handsome, well built, and possessed of an insistent power of attraction. What triumphs the future held for him! His contentment would have been unimpaired if it were not for the fact that the rendezvous was ahead of him this very evening.

His encounter with this woman, her advances, the way she looked at him, the way she shook hands, made up as a whole an adventure quite sufficient in itself. It had been unexpected, enigmatic, flattering; and it had ended before any harm was done. Wazemmes might have dreamed about it at his leisure, and at his own chosen moments—for example, while he was smoking his cigar. He might have talked about it to some friend in the rue Polonceau, or, better still, to Lambert in the rue des Gardes. He could have found some way of referring to it at the workshop next day. But the rendezvous was overdoing it. The rendezvous threatened to spoil everything.

It was true that when he was with friends, Wazemmes found pleasure, normal in a fellow of his age, in talking about sex; and when he was alone or in the company of

people who paid no attention to him, he sometimes let his imagination play the wanton. But in all this there was more responsiveness to other people's example, more respect for the conventions, than real sensualism.

This big fellow was, for the time being, less tormented by sex than most boys of his age. For the last four or five years his body had been monopolised by the business of manufacturing an amount of bone and muscle above the average, and it is probable that the motive parts of his nervous system, including those regions of the brain concerned with action and thought along practical lines, had enjoyed the privilege of a similar growth. Any thin, pale boy whom, if you saw them side by side, you would take to be three years behind him in development, was considerably his elder from the genital point of view.

At the same time, undoubtedly, this kind of peaceful vegetativeness had saved him from nervous complications or perversions of the sexual instinct. If he had practised the vices of adolescence, it was not to excess and it was especially through a sense of openmindedness, lest he should be uninformed about things which his comrades talked about among themselves every day.

But he had not made up a world of his own on this basis ; and if, for lack of precocious impulse, he had not yet become very enterprising where the opposite sex was concerned, he did not suffer either from any fundamental timidity. Grown-up women certainly intimidated him, but it was purely for social reasons. In particular, what he feared about approaching them was letting them see his ignorance of amorous customs, which, despite his stature, would have thrown him back in their eyes into the world of children. But towards girls, big or little, of his own generation he had never experienced that crisis of respectful terror which suddenly seizes upon so many adolescents, and which neither reason nor the ebullition of desire is able to overcome. He had passed without difficulty, and almost without noticing it, from the age when you pull their hair to the age when you put your arm round their waists in a passage.

It followed that the problem of the loss of his virginity had not assumed in his eyes that aspect of anxiety, almost of tragedy, which it possesses for so many others. He thought about it often enough, but without either impatience or apprehension. The thing would happen of itself, all in good time. It was bound to happen in the next few months. He had only to leave himself to the normal play of circumstances. For that matter, so far as the outside world was concerned, the necessities of conversation and of personal prestige often led him to let it be understood that the event had already happened. If a comrade who was still a novice demanded details, he had enough imagination to provide them for him.

This virginity of his, which at any rate had not long to survive – with what kind of woman would he lose it? He was quite hazy on the subject. Apart from the fear of making himself ridiculous, what embarrassed him, in the case of adult women, was that he was so badly informed about the categories into which they fell, their morals, their characteristic reactions, the different ways in which they behaved. He was even vaguer about them than he was about men. He was far from being able to tell their ages exactly. None of the classifications which he applied to them was concerned exclusively with this point of view.

For example, he distinguished between “women,” “respectable women,” and “respectable old women.” But in the difference between “women” and “respectable women” the question of age counted for very little. Any female person of fifty, provided that she was attractive and well dressed, that she had a certain air about her, a certain way of looking at you, a certain perfume, struck him without hesitation as a “woman”; whereas any concierge of twenty-five in the rue de la Goutte-d’Or who was sweeping out her hall, unkempt and uncorseted, with her dress all dusty and her eyes obsessed with thoughts of house-keeping or some conjugal wrangle, was instantly promoted to the rank of “respectable woman.”

Not that he was entirely taken in by the advantages which

social position and wealth give a woman. He did not hesitate to label as "respectable woman" many a well-to-do wife of a professional man or shopkeeper, though she might be well under forty; while a certain laundress in the rue Rochecouart, who was neither very young nor even very tidy – her hair was done up anyhow, and her white smock was not immaculate – struck him as "woman" to the highest degree. In short, he called "women" those persons of the opposite sex who had even a minimum of attraction for him; and in this attraction there might be intermingled a little of everything: beauty, youth, purely sexual charm, cleanliness, sweet-scentedness, elegance of manner and dress.

Another great difficulty of his was classifying "women" according to their probable morals. On this point Wazemmes's enlightenment was feeble and uncertain. He knew that a certain number of women were prostitutes, and he even separated them into two groups, which he called "whores" and "bitches." About "whores," so far as their looks went, he had a very definite idea, which he was able to verify every day. They abounded in his own neighbourhood and took up their position every evening at every street-corner. You met them a little less often than lamp-posts, but much oftener than policemen.

They were bare-headed and wore their hair piled high up, often adorned with a ribbon or a comb. They had prominent busts and hips and clearly defined waists; short, pleated skirts, billowing out at the bottom; and black stockings. As you passed them, they rang the changes on a few stereotyped phrases: "Coming with me?" "Nice boy!" "Want some fun?" "Oh, you do take my fancy, dearie!"

Some of them, instead of plying their trade in the street, awaited customers in special houses, rather like lodging-houses, which were called "brothels." The boulevard de la Chapelle, a few yards away from where Wazemmes lived, was generally considered to be the street which was the richest in "brothels" in the whole of Paris. Such, at least, was the conviction which Wazemmes had acquired

in the course of his moving about, and he displayed a certain pride in it, especially when he was talking to clerks, apprentices, and errand-boys in the centre of the city.

He knew, too, that the "whores" who did not live in these houses had special identification cards and were under constant police supervision. Where did they take the men whom they picked up? Sometimes to their own lodgings, it appeared, but more often to a room in one of those low-down hotels which catered for them. So that, for practical purposes, there was not much difference between these plain "whores" and the "brothel whores," and with either of them the adventure developed in much the same way.

Still, knowledgeable people, or those who pretended to be, claimed that in the regular houses you ran less risk of catching "diseases." They also said that there you had the advantage of choosing the woman you liked best among the inmates, and that it was easy to compare their charms, because they presented themselves almost naked. On the other hand, the atmosphere was not very favourable to shy or sensitive people. The animation of the common room, the exhibitionism of the women, the way they teased their customers and made fun of them—all this lewd display was bound to damp the ardour of anybody who could not imagine love without a trace of mystery, or at least of reticence.

As for the "bitches," Wazemmes would have had some difficulty in defining them or even recognising them. Their looks did not differ so much from those of other women. They wore no uniform. Wazemmes felt inclined to call them "plain-clothes whores," just as there were plain-clothes policemen. Still, they were usually more powdered and painted. Although they dressed fashionably, they stressed whatever was most showy and provocative in the prevailing fashion.

It was really their behaviour, more than anything else, that marked them out. They sat quite alone in cafés and waited there for hours; they walked up and down the boulevards; they made eyes at the passers-by. When the street

happened to be dark or deserted enough, they employed phrases which resembled those of the "whores" as closely as one drop of water resembles another: "Coming with me?" or "Want some fun?" or "You do take my fancy." Only their voices were more refined.

But Wazemmes's knowledge went no further than that. He suspected that the "bitches" constituted a badly delimited category, which was wide open where they merged into respectable women. In practice his powers of perception would often be at fault. Identify a "bitch" sitting pensively with a glass of coffee in front of her – he could do that all right. But suppose she were at the races, on a gentleman's arm; or in a shop, making purchases; or even in a bus, sitting there like anybody else? The difficulty might become extreme.

He would have been less embarrassed if, on the other hand, his ideas about respectable women had been less vague. As a matter of fact, he did not call them by this name. To him they were simply "women" – in other words, persons with whom it was not, in principle, ridiculous to imagine an amorous adventure, but of whom it was impossible to guess whether, for their part, they had the least desire for it. Had they a horror of men, and did they tolerate them only in order to have a home and children? Did they reserve their favours for certain men, whom they preferred for mysterious reasons of their own? From what point of view did they look at very young men?

On this point he feared the worst. Wazemmes was persuaded that the normal reaction of a woman to any advances by a boy of his age would be to box his ears. He extended this hypothesis to girls properly so called – those who were no longer children and expected to get married.

What was he to think about certain ambiguous varieties, such as women who lived by themselves? Here it was no easy matter to draw a distinction. How were you to recognise that a woman who lived by herself was not a "bitch"? You could not very well offer them money by way of experiment.

After passing everything that he thought he knew about women in review, Wazemmes arrived at the point of telling himself that chance had brought him this evening, for him to tackle right at the beginning, a case whose difficulty was beyond words.

What exactly was this lady in the 'bus, this lady of his rendezvous at nine o'clock – at ten past nine? Wazemmes did not even attempt to fix her age. All that he could say about it was that, to look at her, there was nothing of the girl about her. Was she married? Was she a widow? Was she one of those women who, though they are the right age and have the opportunity, avoid marriage? Most probably she lived alone. This evening's rendezvous proved that. Wasn't she simply a "bitch"?

This idea, which he had been resisting all along, was extremely disagreeable to him. Not that he had any particular repugnance where prostitutes were concerned. True, he had no taste for the bare-headed girls in the rue Charbonnière and the boulevard de la Chapelle; but it was their vulgarity with which he reproached them, the way they dressed, their coarse voices, not their traffic in their bodies. He could very well see himself losing his virginity with a "bitch"; and, of all the solutions he could imagine, it was this that still seemed to him the most likely.

The only thing was that he did not want to be taken in. He did not want a "bitch" to be clever enough to make him – him, Wazemmes, Parisian apprentice and well-known figure on the turf – believe that a "woman," out of pure caprice and with no motive of self-interest, had singled him out and chosen him. The tender pressure of her knee, her sidelong glances, would in this case become an abominable hypocrisy. Wazemmes refused to admit these fraudulent means among the solicitations which a "bitch" had a right to use.

The bitterest thing of all, of course, would not be having money extorted out of him; it would be the blow to his self-esteem. It would be the way in which a flattering romance collapsed just to make a fool of him. How would

he be able to tell his comrades afterwards that he had been picked out, in the first class in a 'bus, by a fashionably dressed lady, and that she had taken him home to bestow her favours upon him? Of course, he would tell them that all the same; but he would have to drive himself to do it, and it would be with a little clutch at his heart. It was certainly better to lie than to say nothing or to confess a truth which was not very dazzling. But you tasted a pleasure of an exceptional quality when you had the chance of telling something perfectly true which did you as much honour as a lie.

His common sense – for this he possessed, though he often scorned its humbling, sobering insinuations – did not help him out of his difficulty, because the advice which he received from it was rather contradictory. Common sense told him, indeed, that a boy of sixteen, as well built as the next, but not particularly good-looking, and shabbily dressed, had no right to imagine that a fashionable woman would fall in love with him at sight. But it also told him that a "bitch," handsomely attired and successful enough in her profession to occupy an apartment in the rue Ronsard, would not take all this trouble and lose a whole evening just to get a few pickings out of an apprentice.

"Well, we'll see," he concluded. For, however the thing might turn out, he did not contemplate missing his rendezvous. If a message countermanding it had come, in some way which he could not imagine, he would have welcomed it with relief. Even if the concierge in the rue Ronsard stopped him on his way this evening and said: "The lady has gone out," he would turn back very readily. But he was not going to dodge it on his own account.

All this arguing with himself had prevented him from thinking about the lady's physical charms. Really, he had not seen much of her. He retained only a general memory, which little by little began to have something at once stimulating and soothing about it. The way in which her heavy-lidded eyes glided towards him; her full, red lips; the voluptuous fullness of her cheeks; the shameless, maternal

ring in her voice ; the shameless, maternal abundance of her flesh.

Wazemmes had never asked himself very insistently what his type of woman was. He realised that this type suited him well enough. In his earlier day-dreams, when he imagined himself caressing, possessing a woman, or, rather, being caressed by her ; at night, when he had dreams of delight – was it a woman thin, pale, delicate whom he evoked ? Did he not summon to him forms as plenteous as hers, with eyes, lips, like hers ? The laundress in the rue Rochechouart was rather plump, too.

Not that he was ready, all the same, to deny the ideal of a woman quite different : slim, fair, almost fragile, with blue eyes of tragic purity and an aureole of celestial spaces about her – a figure which he had doubtless never seen, but which he owed to his reading of novelettes, to advertisements, to the covers of cigarette-paper packets, to street-songs, and perhaps to the Nordic blood which ran in him.

How was all this to be reconciled ? When he went to his rendezvous with the lady, would he be making a definite choice ? Was he renouncing, once and for all, that fine, fair phantom whom he felt that he would need when his heart was touched by poetry ? Happily the world of love is as wide as the heart itself.


 PARISIAN WORKERS
 

**D**URING dinner Wazemmes's uncle – his name was Victor Miraud, and he was only his uncle by marriage, on his mother's side – listened to his nephew almost without answering him, and as though he were thinking about something else.

The meal, furthermore, was not a long one. Victor Miraud was fond of good food, and he would gladly have lingered at table. While his wife was alive, one meal out of the two on week-days, and both meals on Sundays, were taken leisurely in the dining-room. Since he had been a widower, Miraud, who, except when he entertained a friend very occasionally, prepared his food himself and had nobody but young Wazemmes to help him serve it, had to content himself with the kitchen, which was indeed large enough, but as cheerless as most Parisian kitchens. He resented this, for he had a taste for comfort and also some sense of the fitness of things. So he hurried over the meal in order to go and take his coffee in one of the two rooms that looked out on the rue Polonceau.

The third room, which looked out on the courtyard, was small, dark, and poorly ventilated. It had served as a bedroom for the Mirauds' two daughters and then, when they got married, for the parents themselves. One of the front rooms had thus become free. Miraud had taken advantage of the fact to fit it up in his leisure time in a way of which he had dreamed for years, and it was now his pride.

" Shall I bring the coffee into the dining-room ? " asked Wazemmes.

" No ; into the library."

His uncle got up and lit a large oil-lamp, which he took up ; then, just as he was leaving the kitchen, he added :

" You might leave enough for two more cups of coffee on the stove, because Monsieur Roquin is coming to see me about half past eight. Get out the liqueur-glasses, too, and light the gas in the dining-room."

It was ten past eight. The coffee would be ready in three minutes. When should Wazemmes make the toilet which he regarded as indispensable ? Before or after Roquin's arrival ? He would be less likely to be disturbed while the two men were talking ; but that meant that Roquin must not be too late.

Miraud crossed the little dining-room, skirting the round table. Before he went into the next room, he looked, with the same pleasure that they always gave him, at the two panels of the fine oak folding door, carved and fluted, with which he had replaced the former communicating door. The light of the lamp picked out the relief of the ornamentation and figures. Here, in the heart of this Parisian worker's apartment, you could see welling forth, like a perpetual spring of magnificence, that dreaming which went to the making of châteaux and cathedrals.

Old Miraud glowed with his pride in it, and there was a catch in his throat. He had some very dogmatic ideas which preserved him from envying the luxury of the rich ; but he had a deep love for beautiful things. There were days, indeed, when he had the feeling that the two or three beautiful things which he possessed gave him a very worthy standing in life.

" I'm lucky," he said to himself. " How many people are there, this evening, who will have the pleasure of taking their coffee in a room like the one I have there, the other side of that door ? The door itself is, perhaps, even finer when you see it from the other side."

He pushed the folding door and went into his room.

How lovely, how friendly it all was ! How it welcomed him, how faithful it was to him, this place that was so full of his dearest thoughts !

Miraud placed the lamp on the mantelpiece and sat down in a big oak chair. Even though the refraction of the glass helped it, the lamp did not shed a very strong light, and the dark colour of the furniture and the walls absorbed most of it. Miraud had not even dreamed of introducing the gas which lit the dining-room and the kitchen into this room ; for one of its chief ornaments was the ceiling, which Miraud had decorated himself and which had cost him perhaps a hundred and fifty hours of the most exacting work. Gas would have quickly spoilt its painting, which, after more than five years, still remained fresh.

Wazemmes brought in the coffee.

" Sit down a minute," his uncle said to him. " What was all this you were telling me ? Somebody has offered you a job ? "

" Yes."

" What sort of job, exactly ? "

" I told you - in an office. I shall also have to go and see people. I shall be a kind of partner."

" Hum ! "

" I mean it."

" Yes, but an office of what ? Partner in what ? You don't seem to be very definite about it. And this fellow you're talking about - you only know him from meeting him on a racecourse ? Watch out ! "

He stopped, drank a mouthful of coffee, and reflected, picking his teeth at the same time. He used toothpicks which he made himself out of match-ends, cut to the proper shape, whose tips he was careful to dip in tincture of iodine.

Victor Miraud, who was of old Parisian stock, had a face and a whole physical appearance of a singular type, which you find from time to time in old working-class districts, especially on the heights of Belleville, in Ménilmontant, in the faubourg Saint-Antoine, and on the southern slope of the hill of Montmartre. You cannot guess to what race

or mixture of races it owes its origin. The stature of this type is short, rather below the average, rarely exceeding five feet three. The legs are short, the trunk thickset, the neck itself short and thick. The walk strikes you at once as slow and heavy, on account of the shortness of the steps and the lack of mobility of the pelvis.

But it is the head, above all, which is curious : a rather cubical head, somewhat large ; a flat, square face, with eyes flush with it, only half-open between two little rolls of flesh ; large, protruding cheek-bones ; a quite inconspicuous nose, sometimes even flattened or at least squat ; a chin equally pushed in, spread sideways ; and, in the case of the men, a small moustache. Diffused over all this is an expression of shrewdness, of subtlety, and of reserve, almost of coldness. The narrow eyes, pressed in between their rolls of flesh, have a steadfast look about them. They are not easily surprised ; they have a hint of mockery and sometimes a gleam of keen intelligence. The voice has the old Parisian accent, of which that of the existing suburbs is a degenerate, degraded form – that old accent which conveys, at one and the same time, quickness of mind and patience of disposition, a shade of conceit, which is a form of self-protection, and fear of being gulled.

When he was thinking, Miraud's eyes, in between their folds, became almost invisible ; but still a light found a way of getting out of them, which set aside any suspicion that he might be drowsing.

"Don't imagine that I have any illusions about the way in which you're going about learning your trade where you are. But that wouldn't matter so much. I could easily find another job for you. No, what annoys me is that the profession doesn't mean anything to you. You think you're above it. . . . When you were at Colbert's – that was the time for you to turn to the best advantage. . . . But where are your diplomas ? . . . What are you trying to make of your life ? – that's what I want to know."

"What I'm trying to make of my life is to avoid getting as old as Péclet and making no more money than he does."

"No more than I used to make myself, eh? . . . Yes. . . ."

The old craftsman smiled, a little bitterly. He threw his head back slightly. He looked up at the ceiling – at the fine oval which he had designed and filled in with smiling figures. He remembered the trouble he had taken over the folds of a tunic, or over that woman, seen three-quarter face. All those Sundays! All those early risings, before dawn! And those nights when he had not slept, harassed by the fear that he had gone badly wrong and made a mess of the whole thing!

*Aristophanes.* He had found his subject in the course of reading the "Group of Idylls" in *La Légende des siècles* over again. All Hugo was there, on the third shelf of the main bookcase – the one with the twisted columns – all the volumes of Father Hugo, in bound octavo volumes.

He had gone over the poem a score of times, line by line:

*Under the willows the maidens come and go. . . .  
The jars they bear upon their heads impede them not,  
When Menelaus comes, to slow their steps and say:  
"Hail, Menelaus!" . . .*

When he was doubtful about the meaning of a word, he had looked it up in his Lachâtre's dictionary, in two volumes. The housepainter trembled a little in the presence of the great poet. But Hugo, arrogant though he might be with emperors, laid his hand upon his shoulder, looked at him out of those eyes of his, which had their own folds of flesh, too, and seemed to say to him, in a voice made golden by the level suns of death: "Courage, comrade!"

Miraud lowered his head again.

"Listen, Félix. I don't want to stand in your way. If you think that you are one of those people who are born to make a fortune, obviously you're not going to take the advice of a man like me. . . . Well, I'll agree – on condition that you don't get yourself mixed up in some shady business. . . . Ask your gentleman, on some pretext or other, to come and see me."

"Oh ! but he isn't a man you can treat like that ! He'd be furious. If you think I'm telling you lies, go and see him yourself."

At this moment the bell rang.

"Ah ! There's Monsieur Roquin. Hurry up and let him in. Is the coffee keeping hot ?"

"Yes. . . . I say, Uncle, I can go out now, can't I - now that your friend will be with you ?"

"Go out ? . . ."

"Yes, just for a walk, with a pal. I can't go to bed so early. And where am I going to sit while you're talking ? . . . Unless you'd rather I stayed here with you ?"

The presence of the boy would have spoiled all the pleasure that Miraud promised himself of an evening with his old comrade. He hastened to say :

"Yes, of course, have your walk, have your walk ! But, as you are so ambitious, don't spend too much of your time with people you pick up in the street."

"How are you ? All right ?"

"Yes - a bit worried about my nephew. He's wasting his time at the workshop, just as he wasted his time at school. And now he wants to change again. A gentleman with some business or other has offered him what he calls a job with a future. . . . Bah ! . . . But it's the kind of reasoning you must expect from fellows like him. He tells me that he doesn't want to get to Péclet's age - you know Péclet, don't you ? - without making any more than he does."

"By the time your nephew gets to Péclet's age, the condition of the workers may have improved."

"He doesn't care whether it has or not. What he wants is not to grow mouldy in the status of a working man. He doesn't know yet just what social classes mean ; but he has got the idea of changing his class already. It looks as though it was an instinct in some types of fellow. As soon as they realise what real work is - well, they've had enough of it. They say to themselves : ' There must be

some better dodge than this.' Of course, a lot of them fall by the wayside. But, whether they're lucky or not, they have the vocation of adventurers.

"It isn't even a question of education, you see. This boy hasn't been living with me long. But his poor parents had the same ideas as we have. If he were my son, I'd be still more worried about him. I'd have kept him at Colbert's, he'd have gone to a big school and turned out an engineer, say. You may tell me that that's a way of changing your class, too. But as long as there are classes, it's the only way of changing it that's worth while. And don't forget that they make engineers work pretty hard, and they don't pay them much at the start, either. I'm not sure whether you know Beausire, the manager of the gas-works in the rue Myrrha. His son, who has just left the Training College, could only find a job in a saucepan factory. They pay him a hundred and forty francs a month. I wouldn't have thought it possible."

"So much the better."

"No, I wouldn't say it's so much the better. . . . I see your coffee isn't very hot. I told Félix to look after it; but he doesn't care about that, any more than anything else. Let's warm it up again for you."

"No, no - it's hot enough for me."

"Well, put a drop of kirsch into it, anyway. That needn't stop your having some more kirsch by itself. I get it from that Alsatian in the rue des Poissonniers, who imports it himself. . . . No, I wouldn't say it's so much the better, because his parents have made sacrifices for him; and after a course of study like that, it's out of all proportion."

"I say it's so much the better, because that's half the problem of revolution solved."

"I don't see what you mean."

"You ought to. Those comrades of yours don't realise the importance of having a staff. They think that the trade unions could take the place of the capitalist organisations all at once, and that everything would be all right. . . . No. There's nothing to be done without a technical staff. But

the more engineers you have, and others like them, underpaid, discontented, the closer they will come to us. If capitalism throws them back into the proletariat, at least in sufficient numbers, we don't need anybody else. The power of the middle classes is not so much their capital; it's the fact that the best-educated people, the best-equipped in every way, inevitably become middle-class themselves, even when they spring from the working class."

"That's possible. But don't you think that those who spring from the people remain more or less on our side?"

"That's another story. . . ."

"Look at all the writers and men of learning there are who have fought for the people."

Miraud moved his head slightly from side to side, invoking the books around him, calling them to witness – the volumes of complete works; the illustrated popular editions; the poets, the novelists, the thinkers.

"That's another story," Roquin repeated. "You'd never be done counting those who have betrayed us, either. Still, the writers and the engineers – that makes two of a kind. The long and the short of it is that the intellectuals will stay on our side, or come back to it, if they are repulsed by the other side."

"Weren't you going to the Congress at Marseilles?"

"There was some talk of it. . . . But there are so many people who find so much pleasure in that kind of thing. We have too many mountebanks among us. I don't go so far as to say, as some people do, that those who shout the loudest are in the pay of the employers, or even of the police. But still, it began among the anarchists; and it might very well go on among us. Just imagine: I met Libertad, no later than yesterday, with his blouse, his stick, his hair like Jesus Christ, limping along like anything. It makes me laugh. . . . Are we to take it that there are comrades who are fools enough to believe in him?"

"Not now, I should think."

"It looks as though there were. Otherwise police headquarters wouldn't be so silly as to support him. You've no

idea how clean he is nowadays. Well washed, well combed, immaculate linen – you'd almost want to kiss him. I suppose he's rallied a few little comrades to the banner of sexual emancipation. . . .

"A friend of mine has recommended me to go and see *Grand Soir* at the Théâtre des Arts – what used to be the Batignolles theatre. You can easily get there by Métro. It's wonderful, so he told me. It's about Russian Nihilists. Those Russians are funny people. They nearly made something out of their revolution of 1905. The trouble is all those millions of peasants who worship the Tsar. Just like animals. I always remember the impression it made on me when they trampled one another to death by the hundred at Nicholas's coronation, scrambling for the little bags of food that were thrown to them. You'll see that, if things turn out badly in the Balkans, the Little Father will make them shoulder their knapsacks again, just to keep them tractable. But this time he may lose his throne over it. Oh, do you know whom I saw the other day? Hervé."

"Hadh't you seen him before?"

"Yes, but it was at close quarters this time – and in an impressive setting."

"Where was this?"

"Why, in the Santé prison, of course!"

"Oh yes, he's in jail, isn't he?"

"Since February. He's getting out next month. He's been let off a quarter of his sentence, because he chose solitary confinement. But that doesn't prevent him from writing for that paper of his, or from receiving visitors. I went with a friend of mine who has been carrying on the fight in the *Guerre sociale* ever since it was founded."

"Well, what impression did he make on you?"

"I don't know, old man."

"Are you going back on him?"

"It's not so much a matter of his ideas. No. I've always made reservations about them, though I always felt that he was the only man who had the courage to say things which,

fundamentally, are true, aren't they? I'm thinking about the man himself."

"What about him?"

"He strikes me as a funny kind of comrade."

"No! . . . You don't mean like Libertad?"

"No. More like Aristide Briand.

*'I saw him last there  
When his back was half bare,  
And his neck in the screw,  
At La Roqué-ê-ten.'*

"And now here's a health to the boss!

"I know Sembat, Jaurès, others of them. Sembat is the most honest, kindest man you could meet, not much of a revolutionary, rather out of his element among the people – in short, a bourgeois who really does all he can. For my part, I like him very much, you know. Jaurès . . . of course, he's always thinking a bit too much about what he's going to say next, he has rather too much the air of being a 'worker in words,' an amateur dragged into the arena. But still, you can't help having some respect for him. . . . Hervé . . . he's pleased enough if you take any notice of him at all; but he's delighted if you notice him when he's got his mouth open. When I was at Gaucher's, in the suburbs, there was a mate of ours whose leg we were always pulling. You just had to insinuate: 'Of course, nobody would have the courage to go to the boss and tell him that he's buying glue with some beastly stuff in it, intended to poison the working class. . . . Anybody who dared to say that would have a nerve!' And he'd go and do it, this fellow. In dead earnest, mind you. There was no stopping him."

"And the boss?"

"The boss finally tumbled to the trick. And when this fellow went and told him, on our behalf, that we had decided to go on strike on the day of Ravachol's execution, and that we were all contributing to buy a wreath, the boss put himself down for a couple of francs."

"And did you really go on strike?"

"What do you think?"

"And what about this fellow of yours?"

"We arranged to meet him at dawn at the guillotine, and we told him that if we weren't there, it would be because we had been arrested for shouting seditious cries; and in that case he was to go home and not stir out until the next morning."

"Rather a dirty trick, wasn't it? You made him lose his day's wages?"

"Yes, we did. And there was even one occasion when he actually got himself arrested. If the boss hadn't gone and explained matters, he would have been sent to prison. It was still more of a dirty trick because, once we'd got him out of the way, we sent out to the nearest bar for some Vouvray and spent the money for the wreath on it. Another thing that wasn't very decent of us was that we did all this on a day when, after all, a man was being executed. Of course, we didn't think of it like that — though, as a matter of fact, the anarchists always made us sick."

"When you're young——"

"Yes. . . Besides, the fellows you get in the cabinet-making trade, especially in the suburbs, are a curious lot. They're often quite sincere, but as lazy as can be; and they love their little joke."

Roquin sipped his kirsch as he spoke, with the intent air of a man with a long tradition of civilisation behind him. He had a thin, pale face, very light brown eyes, and a narrow moustache, turning grey.

"It's very good, this kirsch. There used to be a fine one on the Place d'Aligre. I don't know whether there still is. That's a corner of Paris I used to be very fond of, the Place d'Aligre. On market-days you would think you were in a big county town down south, a hundred leagues away from Paris. . . Did you get that plate?"

"Yes, but I haven't hung it up yet."

"I suppose it is Montereau? It's a pity that it will be all by itself, among all these others. It's very pretty, whether it's period stuff or not."

"Oh, it's period all right. It belonged to an aunt of mine, who came from Seine-et-Marne and died in '78, about the time of the Exposition. . . ."

Roquin had turned his head. His eyes were following the line of the door-frame.

"What are you looking at?" Miraud asked him.

"I was thinking that it was a mistake to leave the old mounting."

"Do you really think so?"

"I might take it out for you . . . and replace it by another one. I could carve it to match the design of that ornament there, for example - turning it the other way round, perhaps."

Miraud, as he listened to him, was very much annoyed with himself. He realised for the first time that the commonplace frame of the bay clashed with his precious oak folding door.

"Don't worry about it. There's lots of time to put it right. Remind me of it this winter."

The fact was that Roquin was intimately, fraternally, associated with the story of the door. Their friendship found a memorial in it.

One day, seven or eight years earlier, Roquin was busy in his workshop when Miraud came to speak to him, with anxious excitement in his voice.

"Come round to my place for a minute. I want to ask you whether I've made a fool of myself."

On the way he told him about his adventure. He was just back from the region of Meaux, where he had taken a job for two weeks in a château in which all the interior decoration was being changed. As he was walking along a passage, he had noticed, leaning up against a wall, two oak panels, carved and fluted in places, which must have been dismantled from one of the parts of the château which were undergoing transformation. His heart had really leapt as he saw them. These panels, adorned with cleverly executed figures, hollowed out into reliefs smoothed and polished by age, made of a perfect wood, struck him as the most beautiful

and the most desirable thing in the world. And when, on measuring them, he found that they would just fit the bay of his library, he felt that, in one way or another, he simply must have them.

He approached the contractor. "Do you know whether these panels are for sale?" "I've bought them myself, with the other things that I'm taking away." They had demolished fire-places, dismantled woodwork, stripped stair-cases. "But I'm not going to dispose of it just yet. I have to settle my accounts first." Finally Miraud persuaded him to let him have them. In return, he agreed to forgo his wages for the current week and to work four extra days for nothing. He was anxious to get back to Paris and normally would have refused to go on working even at ordinary rate. The contractor, on the other hand, was in urgent need of his work in order to fulfill his contract.

So Miraud had paid for his panels directly with his work, and, so to speak, with his very life. Their value was not fixed, frozen, contained in a figure. It was as expansive as an emotion.

That day when he came back with them, Roquin had climbed the stairs to Miraud's apartment, planted himself in front of the oak panels, and looked at them in silence for a good five minutes. Miraud wanted to say something, to enlarge upon the merits of the material, the subject, the execution, such-and-such a detail; but he held himself in, fumbling at his hands behind his back and scarcely breathing. Roquin bent over. He inspected the grain of the wood, the pegs, the mortises. With the blade of his pen-knife he flicked out a tiny shaving, so cleverly that the wound in the wood was not noticeable afterwards except for a slight lightening of the colour. With the point of his knife he probed two or three selected spots. Finally he opened his mouth.

"They are very good, undoubtedly, and old. There is only just this upright here which may have been restored; and even that wasn't done yesterday. The wood is of very fine quality, and not much worm-eaten. The workmanship

of the carving is first-rate. As for their market value, somebody at the Hôtel de Ville, or somebody who knows a bargain when he sees one, can tell you better than I could. What I can say is that, if somebody asked me to copy them, it would take me at least three weeks, and, so far as the figures go, I doubt whether I could do as fine work as that."

For there were times when Roquin was modest.

It was he who, after that, assumed the responsibility of adapting the panels to the dimensions of the bay. Luckily the gap was not wide – four centimetres in breadth, and six in height. But it was necessary to achieve invisible joinings, allowing for the wood of the drillings giving a little afterwards. Roquin procured some old oak, brought it to the requisite colour, and, by way of an additional precaution, applied a cover-joint, after reproducing, in flat carving, a motive taken from the lateral ornamentation of the panels.

Thereafter he kept on friendly terms with this fine piece of work. He always gave it some mark of attention at one moment or another of his visits. He associated it in particular with the reflections which he was fond of making about the skill of the craftsmen of old as compared with that of the workers of to-day. They were reflections which he kept on turning over and over, even when he was working in silence; but they never degenerated into twaddle, because he kept them alive with fresh arguments and was never afraid of contradicting himself.

One day, for example, he burst in with the statement :

"What fools some customers are ! This one sent for me to restore an eighteenth-century desk. He said to me : 'Well, the workers of to-day couldn't do a job like that, could they?' 'Any time you like – and you wouldn't know the difference.' 'With that inlaid work?' 'Certainly. And even with the warping of the veneer, the cracking of the varnish, and the patina. In other words, I could do all by myself what our eighteenth-century friend was not able to do without the help of time.'"

But another day he observed : "Copying somebody

doesn't mean being as good as he is." Or again : " In our time, when there does happen to be inventiveness, there's no finish." He added : " And as for the inventiveness, what does it amount to, I should like to know ? "

In the presence of a " modernistic " chair or table he shrugged his shoulders. He declared :

" I'm quite open-minded. Naturally, every period must have its own style."

But, as a matter of fact, so far as his own trade was concerned, he was conservative, almost reactionary. As he paid fairly regular visits to the Louvre, to Carnavalet, to Cluny, he combined extensive erudition with his manual skill and his knowledge of procedure, which were both considerable ; and in any discussion he could bring to bear a mixture of technical arguments and historical arguments which generally gave him the last word.

He was far, however, from being clear about the deeper causes of his own state of mind. Doubtless what made him most critical of the " modernistic " experiments was that he could feel nothing in them that came from himself. Something in him protested : " I never found that. I never even tried to find that. I never wanted anybody else to find it ; and nobody ever asked me anything about it."

He suffered, without quite realising it, from living in a world where the man who produces objects is in no degree the master of their form. He knew very well that he belonged to a race of executants. His bitterness led him to say : " Civilisation can't get on without us ; but where it's getting to is above our heads." He thought about machinery, which was not yet much used in his trade ; but there was no reason to believe that it would not soon thrust its services upon this trade, like others. Already people were talking about " the furniture industry." He appreciated quite clearly that the effect of mechanism was not only to concentrate capital ; but that it concentrated also creative power, the resources of the mind.

A revolutionary syndicalist, he refused to mourn over any period of the past, about which, indeed, he was poorly

informed apart from the history of furniture ; for he was much less of a reader than Miraud. But he had a vague impression that, long before they had a right to vote, the working people had once had a right to create ; and it was to this quite implicit throw-back of his to the Middle Ages, of which he did not even attempt to form an idea for himself and whose very name was suspect to him, that his syndicalist faith nevertheless owed all that was warm-blooded and real in it.

Miraud, on the other hand, while he was quite close to him so far as the formula of his convictions went, was much more attached, in the feeling which he put into them, to the more recent democratic tradition. The thinkers who had founded it remained, in his eyes, the prophets of a better future. Though he was far from being satisfied with the period in which he lived, it was upon the accentuation of certain of its own leading tendencies that he counted ; and the picture of the society of to-morrow which he made up for himself was not so very far removed from the ideal that his period itself was pleased to proclaim whenever it let itself go, through the mouths of its politicians, in effusions which were only barely lies.

A more equitable distribution of wealth and power ; more satisfactory methods of recruiting leaders of all categories ; the suppression of parasites ; safeguards against the greed and trickery of individuals, aimed at preventing the fruits of labour from being turned to the profit of the few – Victor Miraud would not have demanded much more from the Republic before giving it, once again, the confidence which had been given to it by his father, Augustin Miraud, rioter of '48.



WAZEMMES, THE LADY, AND  
"PEOPLE"



AS he went down the stairs from his apartment, finishing his cigar, Wazemmes caught, through the smell of tobacco smoke, that of his own body, which his movement made it easier to detect. He had washed rather hastily. He had not entirely changed his linen. Besides, lest he should attract his uncle's attention, he had kept on his ordinary clothes. The clothes which you wear every day, and in which you have perspired during the summer months, exhale a slightly stale odour. There is added to it, if you take your meals in a kitchen and stay there afterwards to prepare coffee and wash up dishes, a greasy, mouldy smell, which is perhaps even more offensive to the self-esteem of a young man; for social lowliness is a blemish much more serious than bodily uncleanness.

Besides, how can you wash yourself and make yourself beautiful when you have neither bathroom nor lavatory, and when, into the bargain, you are afraid of being disturbed? Wazemmes had thus discovered certain inconveniences about being poor which he had never realised before. You may, in a 'bus, be an exceptionally attractive young man, whom women simply cannot help noticing. But if in more intimate circumstances you give yourself away as a fellow not too clean and obviously in a humble station in life, all your initial advantage is compromised, and you find yourself in a state of inferiority by comparison with anybody

of aristocratic birth, however ill-favoured and mis-shapen he may be.

He still had most of the tips he had received in his pocket : two one-franc coins, one of fifty centimes, and some coppers. As he was passing a barber's shop in the boulevard Barbès, whose basins and bottles shone in the solitude while it was waiting to close, an idea came into his head. He went in.

" Give me a hair-brush – just a hair-brush. And put some eau-de-Cologne on my hair."

The barber, of course, tried to lure Wazemmes into more extensive operations : a hair-cut, a shampoo, etc. . . . But it was already nine o'clock.

" I haven't time."

" That's a pity. Your hair is very long at the back of your neck and round your ears. You can't make it look neat with nothing but a brush. Besides, it's time for you to start shaving. The parting in the middle ? "

Wazemmes emerged with a parting in the middle, hair smooth and shining, and an odour which floated around his head like smoke from a pipe – an odour which did not answer, so far as he could make out, to any exact designation, but was simply the smell of a barber's shop, just as there is a smell of a chemist's shop. But he had also acquired, at the cost of one franc fifty, a small-size bottle, adorned with the name : " April Smile." It was a scent which the barber had recommended to him as " unobtrusive and lasting ; and, above all, highly genteel."

As he walked along, Wazemmes tore off the cap and took out the cork. When he reached the rue Christiani, which was unfrequented and dark, he loosened his collar in front and poured about half the bottle down his chest. Then he did the same thing down his back.

He felt it suddenly streaming down his body – a sensation of dampness, cold and smarting at one and the same time, which trickled about in a capricious kind of way, reached unexpected places, ran all down one fold of his body, and finished up in one of his socks. Meanwhile his head,

assailed by a wave of heavy perfume, was swimming a little.

"Evidently I've overdone it," thought Wazemmes; "and it isn't very well distributed."

But the scent had made its way far enough to be likely, at no matter what point, to cover less elegant odours. His whole body felt more confident, as though he were wearing a mask. As for his clothes, it would be devilish bad luck if the discharges of "April Smile," which kept on spraying them like a machine-gun, did not get the better of sweat and grease.

"Yes, here you are. . . . You didn't ring opposite? Good. Be quick and come in. There are so many people in these houses that you can't stop a couple of minutes on the landing without somebody passing. The concierge didn't ask you anything?"

"Oh, but what a scent there is off you! Isn't that nice of him? He smells like a courtesan. You weren't as perfumed as that in the 'bus, were you? I should have noticed it—and so would all the other passengers. So you put that on to come and see me? That's what I call real politeness. Let me hang up your hat here. If it will stick. No, it won't. Let's put it down here. This way. It's not very big, this place of mine. The best thing about it is the view I have over the garden.

"Oh, but this is really unbelievable! You simply fill the whole place with the smell of you. It's just like when you break a bottle of eau-de-Cologne in your trunk. What on earth is it? What do you call the stuff? 'April Smile!' Isn't that nice? You're an April smile yourself. Sit down here. Really, I rather like a scent that's a bit common. Those high-brow scents—they make me think of a business man making love. It's hypocrisy. Because really scent is only intended for one thing—just to excite you. I know very well that you can be terribly excited by a delicate scent; and with those that aren't, when there's too much of them, where they really give you a pain is in the heart. . . . Ha! ha! ha!

"Can't you kiss better than that? What about when you're with your little lady friends? Of course, when he's with his little lady friends, they leave it to him. Here he leaves it to me. He wants to do the right thing.

"It's nice, this down on your cheeks. So Monsieur has never shaved yet, eh? That's a sensation he doesn't know. Just imagine that! And this shadow of a moustache. It isn't even a shadow – it's just a wraith. . . . What are you looking at? Afraid of their seeing us from out there? There aren't many people about at this time of night. But, of course, if Monsieur the young lady, Monsieur the modest young lady, wants to make quite sure——

"There! The curtains are drawn. What are you looking at now? My books? You're thinking that there are too many books – much too many? Yes, you're quite right. Nice little boy – little blue-eyed boy. What does he want? Powder and shot? . . . Ha ha! No – he wants to be loved. Anyway he's sure he doesn't care a hang about books. I don't, either, dear boy of my heart. I'd give all the books in the world for a boy like you. . . . Have you got a lot, too? Isn't that funny? What have you got, eh? . . . Michelet's *History of France*, in twenty-eight volumes? Oh, that's the funniest thing yet! . . . Why should I think it funny? Oh, for no reason, for no reason.

"Seriously, hasn't anybody ever taught you how to kiss? How do you like that? And that? That down of yours, that down on your cheek! I'm going to eat you up.

"Listen. Promise me something. Promise. That you'll come back to-morrow. No, to-morrow I can't. The day after to-morrow? Promise. And you'll be good until then?

"You understand, don't you? It's so lovely. I don't want to go too fast. For your sake, too.

"Make yourself comfortable. Yes, flat on your back. The wall is uncomfortable? Put this cushion behind your head, you dear boy.

"Don't mind me. No, no! Look at the books, if you like. Or at the pictures.

“ Don’t move, dear.

“ That’s all right.

“ My dear – my dear little man ! ”

Wazemmes went along the rue Ronsard. There was very little light. There was no noise at all. The hanging gardens diffused into the street a mist that was rather cold, but pretty to look at.

Wazemmes had a feeling that, with very little effort, he could exercise some of those powers which we possess so easily in our dreams. For example, he could leave the ground and fly hovering all the length of the gardens, or right up to the top of that tall chimney, which belonged to the waterworks.

It was not that he was particularly pleased with himself. He was intoxicated rather than pleased ; and above all – a supreme source of embarrassment – he did not know whether he ought to be pleased with himself or not.

The things that happen to you, without any exception, mean nothing whatever in themselves. They are not differentiated – neither good nor bad. Everything depends on the ideas which we form about them.

So it was that Wazemmes, at the moment when he turned out of the rue Ronsard into the rue Seveste, spontaneously rediscovered the fundamental principle of the Stoic philosophers. But his agreement with them did not last long. To begin with, Wazemmes did not draw anything like the same conclusions as his predecessors. He did not deem it necessary to fashion an idea of his own about the valuation, the classification, of things. This was not from any sluggishness of mind, but because, unlike the Stoics and many other people, he felt that, at least in so far as the art of living was concerned, a kind of collective exercise of the faculty of reason offered better guarantees than its individual exercise.

In Wazemmes’s eyes, the Admirable Crichton who knew his way best about everything, who had been everywhere, who was familiar in any given case with “ the rules ” and with the opinion, in respect of good or bad, which we ought

to have about what happens to us ; who possessed experience, knowledge, discernment, was not anybody in particular, but just "people." When Wazemmes consulted somebody about these matters, it was not because he believed this somebody to be better fitted than he was himself to pass a personal judgment upon them ; it was because this other person seemed to him to be more in touch with what "people" might think or say about them. And when Wazemmes, on his own account, made an effort to think things over, or even to think things out, it was most often for the purpose of trying to divine what was, or what might be, or what ought to be, on this, that, or the other point, the opinion of "people."

But there must be no misunderstanding about it : what mattered was the real, sincere thoughts of these "people" – not in the least what "people" said to gull fools. Wazemmes was not in the least duped by that farce. "People" quite openly professed opinions – such as were to be found, especially, in school-books, in the admonitions of parents, in official speeches – in which "people" did not believe for a moment. For example, "people" said, for the benefit of anybody who chose to listen to them, that it was a bad thing to expect to get rich without working, and that a young man ought to keep his virtue as long as possible. Happily, however, "people" contradicted themselves and thus gave away how much deceitfulness there was in many of the things they said.

Read the same paper from beginning to end. You would find a leading article protesting against the reputation for easy virtue which was attributed to French women ; but a story on the third page would describe a scene of Parisian adultery for you, with all the air of applauding it and envying people who could amuse themselves like that. Well, the story was what "people" thought. The article was what "people" pretended to think. Let fellows who were not born fools take note.

At the moment, the question which worried Wazemmes was this : if "people" had been present at the adventure

which had just happened to him, or if they were given a faithful report of it, what would they think of it? Would they think that Wazemmes ought to be pleased with himself, or not so pleased, or rather angry with himself?

Unquestionably he had enjoyed a physical pleasure, which at one moment had been intense. But in the first place, in this particular form, it had not been a complete revelation to the young man; and, besides, Wazemmes was not one of those people who are able, in the twinkling of an eye, to construct an immense, hazy castle of emotions and ideas around a sensation. He was not even capable of thinking very strongly about his experience. His mind fastened rather upon circumstances, upon whatever agreeable or disagreeable elements they might possess.

The pleasure which he recalled, therefore, could not prevent him from being perplexed about the quality, good or bad, of his adventure. What a pity it was that things had turned out like that! If, at this moment, Wazemmes had lost his virginity, in the ordinary way, without any possible discussion, he could surrender himself to a sense of triumph. For could he dream about having lost it in better conditions – that fine woman in her expensive dressing-gown; that well-furnished room; that view over the gardens, which the curtains soon shut out, but which you remembered; those books; and not the smallest hint of a demand for money?

But, to be quite frank about it, he had not lost it. Was that his own fault? Had he been wanting, at a given moment, in some display of initiative, some piece of audacity, which might possibly be within “the rules” of his sex? Had he not, by that mere fact, made himself ridiculous? Perhaps he had led the lady to believe that he was too young for such performances. Had she, perhaps, treated him like a child, whom you do not like to get rid of without giving him a sweet – which was in itself tantamount to relegating him to the vices of childhood?

It was true that she had given him an appointment for the day after to-morrow. How was he to act the day after

to-morrow ? After he had shown himself so docile, would it be proper for him to try to regain the upper hand, to take charge of things in his own way ? And, in the first place, he would have to know the way.

Here he was at the corner of the boulevard Rochechouart, more uncertain than ever. He was not even sure that he was going to lose his virginity next Thursday.

Some "whores" were lying in wait on the pavement ; some "bitches" were walking up and down the sandy path in the middle. Wazemmes looked them over with unaccustomed insolence. When he passed one of them, he was not afraid to stare at her. He examined her eyes, her mouth, the shape of her lips. Inside him, he felt like laughing.

He crossed the Place du Delta. Once more he saw the spot where the lady in the 'bus had accosted him several hours earlier. He had an impression that a woman who had just passed him had been giving him the glad eye. "I must attract them." He went up to a mirror in a chemist's window and looked at himself. A remnant of the "April Smile" scent haunted his nostrils. He was sorry about that piece of silliness ; but it did not hurt him, because it seemed to him that he had surmounted it.

He thought about women in general with some contempt. Prostitutes, of course ; but what about the others ?

As a matter of fact, in spite of his comrades' conversation, in spite of his own imaginings, he had not believed that they were really so shameless. "But still, look what they are capable of !" He was disappointed to find them incredibly like what he had dreamed about them. When he was a few years older, when he had made a lot of money in business, what wouldn't they do to gorge themselves on him ?

Corner of the boulevard Barbès. The boulevard de la Chapelle. Wazemmes walked underneath the viaduct of the Métro. Big square pillars, then cast-iron columns. The columns grew taller. Before the footsteps of the young man who was still virgin stretched an enormous hypostyle

temple, into whose shadows little lamp-posts stabbed viciously, sideways. A Métro train rumbled overhead. A Nord train rumbled and whistled perpendicularly underneath. In the shadow of the columns "whores" kept the vigil of physical love.

To make the best of all the things that he needed to feel all at once to-night, Wazemmes realised with astonishment – it was the first time such an idea had ever entered his head, and perhaps the last time, too – he needed a soul more spacious than his own.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

FOR the purpose of assisting the reader in recalling the contents of a Book – or if, for any reason, he wishes, in the course of the publication of this work, to refer to events that have gone before – a short summary is appended at the end of each Book. It should be emphasised that these summaries – which serve merely to recall the main incidents – have no other object except that of lightening the task imposed upon the reader's memory. In other words, they should never be read *before* the Book to which they refer. They will, indeed, convey very little meaning to anybody who has not already followed the development of the narrative.

The purpose which these summaries are intended to serve will be supplemented by reference to the "Index of Characters," which will be published from the end of Book Two onwards.



## S U M M A R Y



**T**HE 6th of October, 1908. Early dawn. Sun and coolness. Suburban Paris goes to work. How people look. How they dress. What they are thinking about, important and unimportant. Cholera; the Métro; flying; the syndicalist movement; the day's crime. But, above all, the threat of a Balkan war, and perhaps of a general European war.

Nine o'clock. In the rue Montmartre, idlers watch decorative painters at work in a workshop where young Wazemmes is an apprentice. The pretty actress Germaine Baader is asleep in her bedroom overlooking the Quai des Grands-Augustins. At the de Saint-Papouls' home Madame gives orders, Monsieur devotes himself to physical exercises, and Mlle Bernardine to pious reading. At the de Champcenais' home Madame is attended by her manicurist; Monsieur has an enigmatic conversation, on the telephone, about a member of Parliament.

In his class-room in Montmartre, Clanricard the school-master talks to his pupils about the threat of a European war. On the heights of Belleville, Mme Maillecottin does her housework at leisure. On the Left Bank, Juliette Ezzelin leaves home, labouring under deep distress of mind. Meanwhile, far away, Jean Jerphanion dreams his dreams in the train from Saint-Étienne which is taking him to Paris.

A little later, Juliette Ezzelin goes into the shop of Quinette the bookbinder, in the Vaugirard district, and leaves a book with him. He makes an odd impression upon her. On her way back, she notices, in an alley, a man flattening himself curiously against the wall. This man,

a few minutes later, bursts into Quinette's shop and asks if he may have a wash. His hands, his clothes, are stained with blood. Quinette prevails upon this man to meet him that evening, at ten minutes to six, in the rue Saint-Antoine.

Meanwhile in the Montmartre workshop the painter Péclet executes a great decorative composition, and Wazemmes furtively reads a text-book about motor-cars. Half past eleven. Clanricard, anxious about the news of the Balkan and European crisis, goes in search of relief to his old master Sampeyre, with whom he has lunch. Noon. Wazemmes sets out for Enghien races, for the purpose of betting on behalf of his comrades in the workshop. Germaine Baader awakens, and thinks about her troubles, about her body, and about love. Quinette takes a turn around the district where he lives, to find out whether there is any talk about a crime committed in the neighbourhood.

Afternoon. Péclet goes on with his job. Wazemmes, lounging about the racecourse, is approached by a gentleman of good appearance. In Germaine Baader's apartment they are finishing lunch. Her lover, the deputy Gurau, talks to her about the foreign situation and about his intention to ventilate the scandal of the oil interests' revenue frauds in the Chamber. In his train Jerphanion reads the paper and thinks about the time in which he lives and the idea of war which has haunted all his youth.

Half past four. M. de Champcenais, oil-dealer, on his way across the Puteaux bridge, runs into a crowd of strikers. Clanricard, on his way home from school, cannot resist quivering with some obscure kind of enthusiasm as a squadron of cavalry goes by. Little Louis Bastide sets out on a wonderful run with his hoop to the very top of the hill of Montmartre. Five o'clock. Evening begins to fall over Paris. The form, the size, of Paris. Lights. Eleven expresses speed from the depths of the provinces. Paris stifles in her ring of fortifications and her suburbs. Her centre and its palpitation.

Quinette goes to his rendezvous in the rue Saint-Antoine. He meets his man of the morning, who, by a complicated

itinerary, takes him to the back room of a little wine-shop in the Jewish quarter. Quinette extracts a half-confession of his crime from him, obtains some details intermingled with evasions, and offers him his advice and assistance. At the Nord station Wazemmes is hailed by the gentleman whom he met at the races. Invitation to a café. The gentleman, Haverkamp, offers him a job. Quinette follows the suspected murderer to the hiding-place which he has chosen, in the rue Taillepain. They talk. How is the other to sidetrack suspicion? How is his trunk to be got out of the hotel where he left it? Quinette discovers a way out. But an incident reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the stranger to him.

Wazemmes, going home from his workshop, takes a 'bus. He receives flattering marks of attention from a fashionably dressed lady. They get out of the 'bus together. The lady invites the young man to come and see her that evening. They part. Wazemmes, who is still virgin, thinks about women, love, and the lady in the 'bus. He goes back to the apartment of his uncle, Victor Miraud. The home, the tastes, the habits of Victor Miraud. His conversation with Roquin the cabinet-maker. The door with carved panels. Working-class ideals. Young Wazemmes, streaming with scent, goes to his rendezvous of gallantry. He is treated nicely by the lady, but he does not by any means lose his virginity. He starts for home, labouring under an intense, but contradictory, sense of excitement, which he parades through the shadows and the lights of a nocturnal boulevard.

BOOK II

*QUINETTE'S CRIME*

# I

MAURICE EZZELIN READS THE  
PAPER

JULIETTE EZZELIN finished laying the breakfast things. Her husband was reading the paper, which the concierge brought up with the milk every morning. He was already dressed. When he had taken his coffee and a couple of slices of bread and butter – in about a quarter of an hour, in fact – he would start for his office.

His hair, which he wore rather long and brushed carefully, keeping it in place with a little hair-oil, was of a lustreless, indeterminate fairness. He had washy blue eyes, and a face which struck you as weak, despite the accentuation of certain features of it. In anybody else's case, a chin like his would have seemed "determined." In his case, it was only an unfortunate excrescence, which a child might be tempted to tug as though it were a beard. His nose on any other face would have been bold and sensual. On his face it was an indiscretion. It compelled you to bear in mind that the nose is an organ which sniffs and has to be blown loudly from time to time, with the handkerchief lingering a second or two afterwards to clean out the cavity of each nostril.

His name was Maurice. Juliette had a horror of this Christian name, which she had always disliked – at least, she thought so – but she had not fully realised its ugliness until after she was married. For her, now, this name evoked a colour, one of the least pleasant which she could imagine : that which you indicate when you speak of hair being a

carroty red. The name of Maurice ought to be reserved for those gingers gone wrong, whose skin is freckled and who always have a half-dumbfounded air about them. Juliette recognised that her husband's hair was not of this colour. But she was not grateful to him for this. It was as though she were looking behind its insipid fairness for that carroty red which it had not the courage to flaunt.

"Maurice" also made her think of "Jocrisse," and of a Jocrisse satisfied to be alive, but with no animation about him, like a best-man labouring to make a wedding party laugh. Here again she had the fairness to admit to herself that her husband was not such a person. He missed being ridiculous. He was only just satisfied to be alive, and sometimes he looked at her rather sadly. He was too shy to pride himself upon being amusing to other people.

Maurice Ezzelin read his paper carefully. The twenty minutes which he devoted to it every morning constituted, with the help of his coffee and his bread and butter, one of the best times in his day. (He went on reading on his way to his office, but without the same sense of being at his ease or the same pleasure. He reserved for the journey articles in which he was not particularly interested, odd paragraphs, advertisements.)

No doubt this kind of reading suited him; but perhaps he sought in it as well a form of protection against himself. The more he had of it, the longer he avoided being alone with his own thoughts. At his office he was protected either by his work or by his comrades' conversation. He had found that books often made him depressed. For one which took him out of himself, only too many reminded him of ideas which he wanted to escape, or even presented them to him with distressing clearness, with painful obviousness – and also with an air of inevitability about them, so far as his outlook on the future and his doubts about it were concerned.

Sometimes he read a passage from the paper aloud to Juliette. She did not like this habit which he had acquired. She found that he read badly, with a rather silly

conscientiousness, as though he were dealing with something worth reading. His gift for doing the wrong thing made him emphasise the most wretched commonplace with the most impressive intonation. Besides, he had a facile voice, with no firmness about it, on which a trace of Parisian accent set the seal of triteness. "The voice of an underling," thought Juliette. She tried to listen to him as little as possible.

It was not that he wanted to assert himself, or that he thought everything he read aloud was worth quoting ; but he was always afraid of Juliette's being bored. He felt that it was one of his duties not to remain silent in her presence. Even if the bits in the paper were not exciting, they were better than anything Maurice Ezzelin could make up on his own account – more especially as it is difficult to shine in a conversation in which the other person says next to nothing. Often, for that matter, when some local incident was concerned, he contented himself with summarising what he had just read, or formulating two or three brief reflections.

"What day of the week is it ?" asked Juliette.

"Why, Monday, of course. Monday, October the 12th."

"So it is."

She was thinking about her book, which had been promised for to-day. But she could not remember now whether the bookbinder had told her to come back about the same time as before or later in the day. She would go this morning. Not at any price did she want to find herself in that shop in the evening. If she waited until to-morrow morning, she would be tempted to put off her call again. She would end by having no courage left to confront that bookbinder with the deep-set eyes.

But what was his address ? She had forgotten to notice the name of the street. No matter. Once she was at the Avenue de Suffren station, she would have no difficulty about finding it again.

"It's surprising how witnesses contradict one another."

"What about ?"

"In this business of the blood-stained train. Yesterday there was no question of anybody but a fair man, who got into Leuthreau's compartment as the train was leaving Paris, and got out again, after killing the Mayor, at Montereau, after midnight. To-day, nothing at all about the fair man. Everybody saw somebody ; but no two of them saw the same thing."

Juliette barely raised her eyes to glance at this wretched fellow talking about the blood-stained train in the steam from his coffee. Even in the vulgarity of being fond of crime-stories he was not wanting.

"Hallo – really, this is pretty close to us."

"What is ?"

"Still, it's not really so close, after all. The rue Dailloud, Vaugirard way. It only goes to show what little notice people take of you, except when they want to do you harm.

" . . . Yesterday evening, in the hovel in question, at the foot of the stairs near the door, the body of a woman of about fifty was discovered. Death had taken place about a week ago. Examination of the body soon showed that it was a case of murder. The murderer must have employed both a blunt weapon and a sharp weapon. As a matter of fact, a knife bearing traces of blood was found near the body. The deceased, who lived alone, carried on a number of occupations. She dealt in pawn-tickets. She also told fortunes by cards. She may have had sources of income even less respectable. The hovel contained a certain amount of cheap silverware – in particular, plated spoons and forks, tied up in packets of a dozen. Although robbery appears to have been the motive of the crime, the perpetrator of the deed did not see fit to carry off this booty. He may have contented himself with taking loose money, together with a few objects of special value. Or he may have been disturbed and had to effect his escape before he had made a clean sweep.

" "Some surprise is felt that the crime was not discovered earlier. Without being very frequently visited, the hovel was the scene of a certain amount of coming and going.

How did it happen that neither visitors nor neighbours were struck by the absence of signs of life for such an unusual length of time ? It was, it appears, the miaowing of a cat, shut up in the hovel, which finally attracted the attention of the neighbours and decided them to send for the police.' ”

Juliette had not been listening. She said :

“ Aren't you getting late ? ”

“ Yes, you're right, I am.”

He folded up the paper and kissed Juliette, who kept her lips away from his ; then he hurried out.

After a moment's hesitation she grasped the door-handle. But the door resisted her. The shop was shut. Juliette was surprised. She stepped back a little on the pavement and looked at the front of the shop.

"Excuse me, madame. I was just putting things straight. I had bolted the door."

"Your book . . . your book. . . . But . . ."

“But – when did I promise it you, madame ?”

"For this morning?"

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"Well, even if you had not come until this evening, it would still not have been finished. I'm not in the habit of breaking my word. But I have unfortunately been interrupted. I am very sorry."

"I don't see my book anywhere," thought Juliette. "It isn't here at all. What has he done with it?" She would have liked to question the bookbinder, but did not want to offend him. He went on :

"This is Monday. I shall try to finish it by the day after to-morrow, in the morning. If you would leave me your address, I will have it sent to you, and that will save you the trouble of coming again."

Juliette was confused.

"The fact is - I wanted to have it now. I would almost rather you gave it back to me."

"But, madame," replied Quinette quietly, "I presume it is the book with its binding that you want? None of my colleagues - not one of them - could bind it for you before Wednesday. Besides, the work is already begun."

"Nothing has happened to the book, has it?"

"Of course not, madame. I would show it to you to satisfy you; but it is at this moment in a special press, and it ought not to be touched until the glue has set."

"Very well, monsieur. It doesn't matter. I shall come back on Wednesday morning; or I shall send somebody. *Au revoir, monsieur.*"

Once he was alone again, Quinette addressed confused reproaches to himself. It was not that he was particularly dissatisfied with himself. It had been a good idea of his to go and open the door, after he had first decided that he would not stir. He had pulled himself together at once, and, so far as he could tell, he had not, even at the beginning, betrayed any very suspicious sense of disturbance.

But all this was not very much. He should have done something better than that. What? He was not sure. His common sense certainly told him that, in circumstances such as those in which he found himself, the only thing that

mattered was to dispose of the immediate danger, the one that was already right on top of him. Any disposition to complicate the situation still further, to add the risks of any new adventure, whatever it might be, to the risks he was already running, would be next door to madness.

But still he caught a glimpse of a whole system of life, whose fundamental rule would be never to shirk any enterprise, so long as it was theoretically possible, once chance put the bait of it in your way. This line of conduct corresponded with a general outlook on life, with a myth of the "strong man," which Quinette could not quite succeed in attaining, towards which he could only grope through a kind of mental mist, as shining as it was shifting. But, above all, it would be associated, in the very depths of your consciousness, with a sense of constant resourcefulness. It would find its immediate reward in the very tensiety which you would feel all the time. Any lingering idea of boredom would be dispersed from the very moment when you adopted it. So much would this be so that final success would seem merely a secondary result, a sort of additional proof, altogether apart from the undertaking itself, which it would simply validate.

Out of all these fugitive intuitions he isolated a few more precise ideas : in the first place this one — that, in the normal course of life, which you accept by sheer force of habit, you spend your time in preventing yourself from going on with activities which have already begun ; that you do so without any sound reason, out of mere cowardice, or distrust of yourself ; and that, in doing so, you keep on committing a kind of laying waste of yourself, just like a man walking in his garden and cutting off everything that raises its head, every shoot that is most sure of growing.

A woman comes to see you for the second time. She is young and beautiful. It is not necessary to have any plan, any objective, laid down beforehand. But it is not permissible to let her go away again without doing anything to advance towards some objective. If you try to make excuses for yourself, by saying, for example, that you are

up to the neck in a murder affair which the papers report this morning, and that you need all the presence of mind, all the resourcefulness of mind, you possess to stop the police from knocking at your door within the next few hours, or within the next hour, and asking you what a certain trunk hidden in your back shop is doing there — then you are merely confessing that you are lacking in breadth of view.

Quinnette found a comparison which helped him to see what he was driving at more clearly. There are some shopkeepers who are afraid of being overwhelmed with orders. There are others, on the contrary, who make it a matter of principle never to refuse an order, no matter what happens. They will do the best they can. Everybody will be satisfied, sooner or later. These people display a kind of commercial heroism. Quinnette, who was a shopkeeper in his spare time, did not set much store upon heroism of this sort so far as his own business was concerned. But what he had in his head was a transposition of it on to a more elevated plane.

At this moment he remembered his Herculex belt. He smiled, with a kind of ambiguous indulgence which applied both to the Herculex belt and to himself. He was conscious this morning of a state of intellectual healthiness which justified him in being tolerant, just as a strong government can afford to be. It did not cost him anything to bestow upon this apparatus, which had by now become familiar to him, a trust with a tinge of irony about it. He had no need of that full-bodied certitude such as you require when doubt or distress of mind is preying upon you. If the belt had something to do with the vitality which he felt within him, so much the better. If it had nothing to do with it, why worry about it? It played its part as a fetish just as well as anything else.

In certain cases to know the truth quite definitely is the essentially important thing. The very smallest risk of being mistaken must be drastically eliminated. Otherwise you are a fool or a trifle, and events will make it their business to punish you. But in other cases illusion does not matter. It may even amuse you, keep you company, help you along

like a glass of wine or a cigarette. (Quinette was not a smoker, and he drank little. Illusion, thus understood, may be regarded as his own particular form of drug.) What does matter is to know which cases are which.

All these thoughts of his had not lasted three minutes. The bookbinder shot the bolt of the door again and returned to his back shop. The sense of excitement which possessed him, and which for the moment had assumed the form of an exuberance of bold ideas, was the legacy of the very keen emotion that he had felt this morning.

He had gone out, a little before eight o'clock, to make his usual small purchases. He had bought a paper. While he was still in the street, he had satisfied himself with running over it, anxious, as he was every morning, to see whether the still hidden "deed" had cropped up among the news. He had missed the report – how, he still could not understand. No doubt the fact that he had done so was partly due to the prominence which was given in the papers to the murder in the Burgundy express. (This, as a matter of fact, was an affair which interested Quinette from more than one point of view.)

Besides, as one morning followed another, the belief, unreasonable as it might be, had begun to establish itself in his mind that things were going to remain where they stood. It was as though the hidden deed refused to come out, as though it was burrowing into the past with a quite natural downward movement towards oblivion. "There are many crimes which are never found out; and more than one imagines." This thought had, perhaps, turned him aside from finding the news he was looking for at the first glance.

When he got back to his shop, he resumed his ransacking of the paper at his leisure. Suddenly the headline leapt to his eyes: "Murdered a week ago." He read the report – read it greedily, with a kind of arid trembling, which kept on getting worse. His first reaction was to go and shoot the bolt of the street door. He held on hard to the corner of his

table. He sat down again. Over and over again he repeated, in a low voice :

" Ah, so that's it ! So that's it ! "

Almost immediately he thought of the trunk, which he had put in a corner of the back shop, behind a cretonne curtain. Suddenly he had an irrational desire to take to flight, without any preparation – just to put on his hat and go, anywhere.

At the end of five minutes his mind started functioning again. He read the report over once more, isolating the meaning of every sentence, doing his utmost to assimilate it. Crowding thoughts accompanied, or shot across, or interrupted his reading of it.

" 18 rue Dailoud. My own street. Only a couple of yards away. Almost at my very door. Extraordinary. I don't remember that hovel. I didn't know it existed. On a big courtyard. . . . What courtyard ? "

He was a bad observer. He knew he was. But he did not like admitting it to himself. When he walked along the street, he was always preoccupied, absorbed in his own affairs. Especially in this neighbourhood which he thought he knew. His eyes, piercing though they were, were effective for the purpose of seeing things only when he deliberately concentrated their gaze upon something in particular.

" A woman. I felt instinctively from the start that it was a woman. But I saw her as older. Dead for a week. That's wrong. Only six days. A blunt instrument and a knife. Motive of the crime – theft. "

In substance the picture which he had conjured up of what had happened, from the very first day, was one of remarkable exactitude. His woman was a little too old. A little house instead of a hovel. Unimportant differences. There remained the question of the time. Just how had the deed taken place ? The newspaper said nothing about it. There again Quinette's hypotheses, aided by the printer's confidences, very partial though they were, could not have been far wrong.

" A bad observer perhaps," he said to himself. " For that

matter, with a little training, that's something you can correct. But first-class in anything that has to do with mental construction – or reconstruction."

This flattering reflection was suddenly brushed aside by another, which was a bitter one. He, who had saved this man, at least for the time being, had not succeeded, in the course of six days of daily interviews, in making him confess the equivalent of what all Paris could learn from the papers this morning. It was true that Quinette had not pressed him. On the contrary. He had preferred to surround him with his influence, to accustom him, little by little, to a state of submission to him in everything. To drag a man's secret out of him is merely taking possession of one detail of that man. What the bookbinder wanted to do was to lay hands on the whole of the man. His secrets would come afterwards, of themselves. Quinette had ended by believing that he had time enough. The secrets were beginning to come. But they might have come sooner.

What information had the other surrendered to him? His name: Augustin Leheudry. His age: thirty-one. Stories about his childhood, his profession, his hard luck, his pilferings. His states of mind. An astonishing profusion of states of mind. Leheudry was by nature a fretful soul. He brooded over his troubles. He not only suffered from them; he had a positive passion for them.

He expressed them badly; but, by dint of repeating himself, going back on his tracks, hemming and hawing, he finally succeeded in conveying them to you. Quinette believed that he could realise perfectly well why the printer had, one day, become a murderer. But he realised it without any sympathy for him. Leheudry's crime was, at bottom, one of unreason, of weakness. That was something which he, Quinette, despised.

Leheudry had visited his victim not to kill, but to steal. And he had decided to steal less from need of money than from exasperation. He was furious because he had lost his last job and had not found another. And he was not so much furious with society, as an anarchist might be, as with

himself and his own destiny. He had become a burglar to trample upon his destiny.

If he had killed – on this point he had made no definite confession to Quinette ; but in the course of his conversation the thing had gradually become clear – if he had killed, it was only at the last moment, when his victim tried to stop him, to deprive him of his “booty,” as the paper called it. He had thought himself lost and, above all, robbed in his turn. He had seen no way out except murder.

This act of self-defence, crazy though it was, might have something to be said for it. The plea, for that matter, was commonplace. But Quinette was persuaded that Leheudry had done nothing to avoid it, that he had seized the opportunity with a kind of feeling of satisfaction, and that the sight of blood had not been unpleasant to him. Sheer perversity, in short. The stuffing of the jacket and the piece of cloth into the parcel of books was another proof of it. Though he had, perhaps, no particular horror of perversity and cruelty, Quinette was conscious that he did not like them. In any case, he did not understand them.

Quinette realised that in connection with the “deed” he was now freely using the words “crime,” “murder,” “murderer.” It was because, since this morning, all this was authorised.

“How could I have been such a fool as to say to myself that there were crimes like this which were never found out? Sluggishness of thought. Confusion of categories. A poisoning may remain concealed. So, conceivably, may a murder committed inside a family, which the complicity of members of it masks as accident or suicide. But the ordinary crime, committed by an outsider, is bound to come to light. This crime was bound to be discovered. My common sense ought to have told me so.”

In short, an event of this kind might remain, for a longer or shorter time, in a first zone : that of unknown crimes ; but it passed sooner or later into a second : that of known crimes, with unknown criminals. What had happened

overnight was the transition from one zone to the other : from the unknown crime to the unknown criminal.

But what about the third zone ? That of the known criminal ? Was not that transition, too, equally inevitable ?

This idea suddenly set Quinette's temples throbbing. It presented itself to him with all the prestige of simplicity and symmetry. It had that commanding presence which gives the most powerful superstitions and great scientific laws the air of belonging to the same family. Face to face with such ideas, the mind of man is subject to a kind of fascination. His reflexes of mental control are suspended. If the idea is a sinister one, this effect of paralysis is accompanied by a painful drilling sensation ; and it is by boring into your very flesh that the idea becomes fixed.

The kind of fright which Quinette experienced – a sense of anticipated damnation, the inevitable approach of coming misfortune – was out of all proportion to the risks which he was running in the case in question. It almost made him forget the Leheudry affair itself. It was as though the law, whose apparent presence had laid its hand on his shoulder, had brought a much wider source of anxiety to life within him.

But all at once the idea lost its strength. The sense of paralysis vanished.

"Come, come ! That won't hold water. There are hundreds, thousands of examples of criminals who are never found out, in crimes just like this. 'Unsolved crimes.' It's a matter of common knowledge."

He smiled at himself. Little by little his enthusiasm came back to him. He struck the sheet of the open newspaper with the flat of his hand. He stood up from his chair. He felt like making a move, doing something. He was spoiling for a fight. As a matter of fact, since last night a fight was on. The police had taken the offensive. It was not for him to remain idle.

Two points strongly attracted him : the hovel, Leheudry. He wanted to run to the hovel, and he wanted to run to Leheudry. Where should he make a beginning ? The hovel

was quite close : the " scene of the crime." It was a well-known fact that a criminal was irresistibly drawn to the " scene of the crime." Quinette had not committed the crime. But was not this desire which he felt associated with that preposterous attraction which the criminal felt, and which so often led to his ruin ? He must resist it. He must do nothing which was not dictated by the light of reason and did not form part of a methodical plan.

If only Leheudry himself had not already returned to the hovel ! Quinette had made him swear not to stir from the neighbourhood of his refuge. But the man was impulsive, and he was a liar. If he had read the paper this morning, would he have had the strength of mind to resist going to the " scene of the crime," the discovered crime ? The only hope was that he had not read the paper. And that was more likely. The printer stayed in bed late, slept as much as possible and had a terror of papers. At this time of day almost certainly he was not up yet.

Would it not be a good thing to go and see him at once – go as fast as possible, say in a taxi, to make sure of catching him ? Put him on his guard. Make him realise that henceforth the smallest slip might mean prison and death. That he must obey implicitly.

Yes, that was the thing to do. Quinette put on his hat.

Just as he was pulling back the bolt, the thought struck him : " And what about the trunk ? " Could he go off like that ? Would it not be extremely rash ? Suppose that the inquiry had made astonishingly rapid progress, and that at any moment, while Quinette was out, the police came and explored that trunk, found what was inside it ?

Quinette did not know yet what story he was going to tell to explain the trunk's presence in his back shop. But, before anything else, he must make sure that it contained nothing compromising. He had opened it only once, three days ago, to take some clean linen to Leheudry. He had looked inside it, but summarily – like a customs officer, not like a policeman. The story he told, whatever its details might be, would have no chance of being believed unless the trunk

contained nothing which could be associated with the crime, nothing which even an investigator most inclined to jump to far-fetched conclusions could possibly regard as incriminating evidence or as an object stolen from the hovel. Anyway, even if they did not believe him, Quinette would thus escape the charge of being a receiver.

So it was imperative to make a minute, searching investigation of that trunk. (With the same rigid methodicalness as last Tuesday, when he had applied himself to the task of making the kitchen clean of any trace of blood, in the scientific sense of the word "trace.") Any suspicious object, anything that lent itself to equivocal interpretation, must be burned.

The worst of it was that it was equally urgent for him to invent a plausible story about the trunk. The first question the police would ask him, if they came in now, or if they were waiting for him on his return, would be : " You have such-and-such a trunk here ? Good. Why ? "

Quinette had, indeed, thought about the answer during these last few days ; but he had not put any hard thinking into it. He had been lazy, like a man awaiting inspiration. Besides, the most ingenious story he could think of would be worthless in so far as it was not confirmed by Leheudry, who would be interrogated separately. Therefore he must go and see Leheudry as soon as possible and teach him his lesson.

There was no way of doing everything at once. There was not even any force of reasoning which dictated an order of urgency. All arguments were forcible, and everything was urgent.

But already he had pushed the trunk into the kitchen, opened it wide, and cleared the table so that he could put all the contents on it one by one. He cleared his throat. He blinked his eyes several times, vigorously. With a twist of his shoulders he freed his neck as much as he could from the encumbrance of his clothes. He sought out in the depths of his being every disposable atom of attention. He effected, in the mechanism of his mind, that kind of change of speed

which makes every one of the senses stand out sharply and profit on its own account, so to speak, by a distinct reasoning faculty, while the inner mind lights up second by second, like a row of footlights.

An hour later he was still keyed up, ready to crouch and spring. But he no longer had a trace of anxiety of the kind that depresses you. All his fear had become offensive.

The surviving contents of the trunk were spread over the table. The smallest object had undergone a rigorous examination, like those fine metallurgical products whose calibre, grain, ring, and elasticity are verified by a dozen testing instruments. The pairs of socks, acquired "at snatchers' fair," had gone into the fire, and so had a pillow-case, a woman's bonnet, and a pair of slippers of doubtful sex, which certainly had nothing to do with the crime in the rue Dailloud, but might have led to questions.

The last ashes had crumbled in the stove. Quinette defied any inquirers in advance.

"Yes, gentlemen, this trunk belongs to a man called Augustin Leheudry, whom I employ from time to time to run errands or to pick up books and bindings for me at second-hand shops. How did I get to know him? Because he called on me one day and asked me if I could give him work. Why have I got his trunk? Because he asked me to take care of it for him for a week or so, telling me that he was moving, and that he would be without any fixed address until he found a place that suited him. He is suspected of the crime which was committed near here? That surprises me very much."

It was at this moment that he heard somebody trying the street door. He trembled, but without losing his head in the least. "It's a customer. I won't open the door." Nevertheless he hastily stuffed everything back into the trunk and pushed it behind the cretonne curtain in his back shop again. Then he was seized with curiosity to know who was there.

As he made his stealthy way towards the door, it occurred

to him that the provisional story which he had just invented made the mistake of not being in accordance with his visit to the hotel in the rue du Château and with what he had said there.

“ I’ll arrange about that.”

For he was sure, now, that he would have time to “ arrange about that.” It was a childish fear that had led him to believe that the police might drop upon him so suddenly.

“ They’re not such geniuses as all that.”

Thereupon he had opened the door to Juliette Ezzelin.

THE SPELL OF THE STREET

WHEN she left the book-binder's, Juliette at first wandered about the neighbouring streets. She thought about her book as you think about somebody dear to you whom you have thoughtlessly put in great danger. Would she ever see it again? She realised now, through her very anxiety, that the two most precious things she had in the world were this book and her packet of letters.

The packet of letters was at home, on a shelf in her wardrobe, right at the back of the very lowest shelf, hidden under her lingerie. Was it safe there? Juliette opened her hand-bag and looked at the key of the wardrobe, a little key of shining steel, with a brass grip. No doubt the lock would not be difficult to force; but after that one would have to attack the inside drawers, which were also locked. Nobody would ever think of groping under her lingerie.

What she was afraid of, in any case, was not so much that her letters should be discovered – reproaches, threats, a separation; what did she care? – as that they should be destroyed, or even soiled by somebody else looking at them. They were Juliette's chief possession, her worldly wealth, the one thing that, as people say, “made life worth living for her.”

It is true that, to have the strength to go on living, you must hold on to something outside yourself. What a queer mystery it is! This life, this wonderful life of ours, which people regard as so precious, surpassing everything else, not to be measured with any other possession, has nothing

in itself that can attach us to it. We believe that we are intensely fond of ourselves, and within our own limits we contain nothing that has the value of a packet of letters or a book.

The shops of Paris are bystanders, potential friends. They are also flowering hedges along the roadside. Windows that glitter. Charm of things for sale, laid out on little shelves of velvet. Freshness in the air. A melancholy, quite impersonal, lies couched, behind a big window, in the corner of the shop-front furthest away from you.

There is not always sunshine, as there is to-day. Sometimes, at this season of the year, there are mornings slightly misty, not yet cold, but when the air passes through your clothes and penetrates you just a little, gives you the mere beginning of a sense of chill which goes no further, which persists, which is a feeling of tenderness, of resignation, bordering upon a state of dreaming. In the sky are clouds softly fashioned, which merge into one another : grey-black clouds, grey-white clouds, with just a hint of light in them, just a little lining of brightness, as though the sun, absent from the heavens, shone upon them from very far away, from all the distance of the seasons' changes away.

Then it is that the shop-fronts hold, and exhale as you pass by them, any number of reflections, of semi-shadows, of shimmerings, of contours of things that have power to move you. You must not even stop. The misty morning of the street, with that sense of chilliness about it, the dappled greyish brightness in the sky, burrow deep down into the shops. Winter is coming ! The time is coming for staying at home, for digging yourself in, for hibernating !

And yet it is just now that is the best time for wandering about the streets. The friendly air of things mingles with the autumnal mist. Any one of these things seems as full of promise as a toy does to a child. Every one of them has a story to tell you if you have ears to hear it. A hat. A watch. A jar of burnt almonds. A silver-plated tea-pot.

Ah, how charming life can be ! Around you comes and goes, and slips away, an indefinable sense of happiness. A

happiness without pride, which nobody would dream of appropriating for himself. A happiness which asks nothing of the future. It hovers motionless or it darts in the chilly morning of the street, in the autumnal sky, in the bays of the shop-fronts, just as fishes, those fruits of the deep, do in the sea.

"I could make such good use of this kind of happiness. I should be only too glad to be satisfied with it. I'm not proud; I'm not greedy. Just one thing is all I want. I don't demand so much as I did once. He wants to be free. Yes. He's right. Just this vague kind of happiness which belongs to anybody – the only people who have a chance of enjoying it are those who are quite free, those who refuse to let themselves be tied by thinking about the future. I wouldn't even ask him to spend so very much time with me. If he wants to have his time to himself. If he's afraid of making a slave of himself. Just to know that he loves me – why can't I be sure even of that much?"

She saw a bus approaching. The place-names inscribed upon it, which she read at a glance, letting one merge into the next, gave her a vague kind of pleasure. She had no time to think about what these names recalled to her or promised her, or to form any clear idea of the itinerary which chance put in her way. Once you are caught up in the movement of the streets, the announcement of any Parisian itinerary acts upon the passer-by like the formula of a charm, or as though a lightning-flash shot through the vast sky of memories, too quickly for the mind to grasp it, but not too quickly for the soul to be moved by it.

Juliette put up her hand to stop the bus and climbed into it. Its creaking closed in around her as though it were purring. She surrendered herself to something that was like a father's clumsy comforting. She had nothing to fear. She could begin to forget. The horses' trot resembled rain on a roof, or the ticking of a clock – those sounds that soothe our lives, by setting us the example of a patient kind of going on. A little of the street came in through the windows. Glimpses of vistas, fragments of

the sky, the black and gold ballad of a tree, tumbled into your lap.

Juliette got out, because a name which she had heard made her want to get out. She dodged herself. She pretended to remember that she had not seen Saint-Étienne-du-Mont for a long time, or the Place du Panthéon, deserted and majestic as some picture of Rome.

When she got there, she walked all round the square, without thinking of anything but the names of the streets opening off it. She felt anxious. She asked herself whether her memory had not played a trick upon her.

“Rue d’Ulm.” She turned pale. She stared at the enamel slab, as though to make it tell her whether it was a good or a bad omen. She turned into the street, which she scarcely knew – only from having walked along it once, with him, last year. To the left, tall buildings ; to the right, low houses. It was farther on. Here were the railings, and the big house-front tucked away behind them.

She stopped at the corner of the rue Thuillier. All at once it became impossible for her to tear herself away from there. She could not take her eyes away from those railings, opposite ; the entrance-lodge, the door. Perhaps the few passers-by, people of the neighbourhood, were surprised to see that young woman standing there motionless, as though she were spying.

## A TALK IN CHURCH

AFTER Juliette had gone, the bookbinder spent a quarter of an hour putting Leheudry's trunk in order again. Then he got ready to go out.

A thought occurred to him – that of the piece of cotton-wool in the match-box, at the very back of his till. There was no chance of the police making a search during his absence. Probably it would not even be legal ; and, anyway, who would think of opening that match-box ? But, for the sake of his own security of mind, he had to tell himself that he was leaving behind him a place purged of any indication, sterilised against any test. He took the box and slipped it into a waistcoat-pocket.

When he reached the boulevard Garibaldi, he hesitated for a moment over the means of transportation which he should employ. But he was not long in coming to the conclusion that speed was more important than any precautions. He hailed a taxi and gave as the address : " Hôtel de Ville Bazaar." It was five past ten.

At that period it was idle to tell a taxi-driver the best way to go, or even to suggest to him that you wanted to proceed by the shortest possible route. The thing was understood, and the chauffeurs were almost all old cab-drivers, as well as old Parisians, who would have been offended if you presumed to teach them their own business.

Quinette stopped the taxi at the corner of the rue du Temple and made sure that the driver saw him entering the bazaar. He walked through it diagonally and came out in the

rue de la Verrerie, near the corner of the rue des Archives. The crowd of women shopping at the ground-floor counters was already dense.

He turned left along the rue de la Verrerie, followed the rue du Renard and the rue du Cloître-Saint-Merri, and approached the rue Taillepain on the side where it ends at the church.

During this walk the idea of his beard worried him a little. "I must be horribly easy to recognise." He wondered for a moment whether he should not have it shaved off. In general, among all the precautions which he had taken, he had paid too little attention hitherto to the question of his appearance. Leheudry had not thought about it either.

Quinette recalled something that Leheudry had said to him that first evening: "You're not a Jew, are you? . . . because of your beard." Especially in this neighbourhood it was by passing himself off as a Jew from the rue des Écouffes that he would attract the least notice. "But I am too tidy. I need an old overcoat." Then he made up his mind to think that he was an elderly Jew, who had got on in the world, which would explain the good appearance of his clothes; a money-lender, for example; or even that he was a Jew from another neighbourhood – a watch-maker, a jeweller – who was bringing some work to a co-religionist.

Under the influence of this idea, he drew in his nostrils, in order to accentuate the curve of his nose. He hunched his shoulders. He dragged his feet a little as he walked, with his legs sagging and his toes turned out. He tried to invest his face with a furtive, ingratiating, cunning expression. This exercise interested him very much. He found both difficulty and pleasure in it.

A man was coming in his direction. Quinette slackened his pace, in order to give the man time to leave the street before he reached the house where Leheudry was staying. When he reached it, he looked back at the two square posts which marked the entrance from the rue Taillepain. Nobody. He glided rapidly into the passage.

He knocked at Leheudry's door. No reply. He knocked louder. Still no reply.

"Hallo, this looks bad ! I hope to goodness that idiot hasn't happened to read the paper and lost his head ! He's quite capable of not coming back here. How am I going to find him . . . before the others do ?"

He hesitated. He stepped out into the little court, cautiously. Suddenly he saw the old landlady. He had already met her once, but in the dark, and so fugitively that he thought she had not noticed him.

"Oh, are you looking for—— ? . . . He's just gone out ; yes, he's just gone out."

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

He asked himself whether he ought to question her.

"You're a friend of his, aren't you ?"

" ' A friend of his ' . . . I don't like the sound of that much," Quinette said to himself.

"I recognised you because of your beard."

Quinette, very much annoyed, tugged at that beard of his, as though he could make it disappear or change the shape of it by kneading it with his hand.

"He hasn't been up very long. He's gone to get his coffee somewhere about here. Somewhere in the rue Rambuteau, I think."

"You don't know just where ?"

"No. No, I don't."

"How long has he been gone ?"

"Five or ten minutes. If you had been a little earlier, you would have caught him."

"I made a mistake," thought Quinette, "in coming all that way through the bazaar. Once more, what matters to-day is speed – not taking little precautions."

"But he's bound to come back," the old woman continued. "He told me that he would be back – perhaps so that I would tell you, in case. Come and wait in my room if you like. I could let you sit in his own room – I have the key. . . ."

"He's left his key with her ! What a fool the man is ! I've got myself tied up with an absolute imbecile."

" . . . But I know he doesn't like anybody to go into his room when he isn't there."

" That's it ! He leaves her his key ! He manages to give her the idea that he has things in his room that he wouldn't want seen ! "

" Listen, madame. If I thought I could find the café where he is, that would suit me much better. You have no idea at all ? "

" It might be at the corner of the rue Rambuteau and the rue Beaubourg. I know that he goes there sometimes."

" Good. I'll try there. In any case, if he comes back, tell him to wait for me. Tell him not to stir. Tell him that I've found a job for him, and that it is very urgent. I shall be back in a quarter of an hour at the most."

" All this is rather my own fault. I have been slack, and not stern enough with him. In the first place, it was understood from the very first day that I was to find another hiding-place for him – that he was to get away from here. He wanted to stay until to-morrow. So as not to sacrifice the week's rent. A miserable reason. I agreed to that. There's no getting away from the fact that I agreed to that. What am I to call it ? Weakness of mind. Weakness of will. A fine example of the way to make mistakes – the way you get caught.

" But there's worse than that. I haven't found his new hiding-place for him yet. I've hardly looked for one. Not seriously. Laziness ? Yes. Might as well look it straight in the face. But suppose we go on like this. Imagine his leaving his key with that old woman ! That's more of my slackness – pretending I didn't want to rush him. I don't even know what he may be hiding in his room. His loot. He must have some loot. What about that parcel he mentioned to me the first day – and about which he's never spoken since ? I looked in all the corners. No cupboards. Under the bed ? The old woman would have found it the first time she cleaned the room.

" Suppose he has it somewhere else. A much more

serious matter. Where? That assumes an accomplice. Somebody else. Somebody else in the secret. The woman in the case? Why didn't I ask him flatly about that? Yes, why didn't I? Because it was part of my system – my progressive method. And also as a matter of decency. He might think that I was going to demand part of the loot; or that I wanted to get hold of it because I didn't intend to give it back to him. For that matter, it was essential not to rush him. I haven't done so badly. What hold had I got over him, after all? But to-day I must take advantage of the shock to get it away from him. Be firm! Be firm!"

Quinette clenched his fists as he walked along.

"There's no alternative. I simply must find him."

Quinette found a picture rapidly forming in his head – a very expressive but highly simplified picture; a large-scale but summary sketch, which lay flat before him, a little slantwise, under a surge of soft, whitish, cloud-coloured light. Something like a relief-map, almost without details and made of some material of no great consistency. Upon it, to the right, a kind of little circle, or, rather a globular projection, vividly lit up, which was the hovel, the scene of the crime. Some distance away from it, towards the centre, a dark mass, ramifying, radiating: the police. Right in front, a point which moved, and which was Quinette. Elsewhere, another point, which was Leheudry.

But the point Leheudry contrived to be present in this space without being situated in it. It was a fleeting point on which you could not fix your eyes. Your thoughts imagined it, so to speak, out of the corner of your eye. All these points were associated in a kind of relentless solidarity. It was as though they were bound together by a network of threads, or a system of stresses.

Such, for the moment, was Quinette's universe. He contemplated it with a stout heart. He repeated to himself:

"I simply must find him. It's impossible, in any case, for me to wash my hands of him. Leheudry free in his movements, independent of me: a mortal danger. Safety rule: hold on to him. I could afford to let him go only if he

disappeared altogether. If, for example, this morning, after reading the paper, he had gone and thrown himself into the Seine."

He reflected.

"That would be one solution. But a poor one. No, I shouldn't like him to have thrown himself into the Seine."

Here a fact which he had not yet realised dawned upon him.

"But then . . . is this going to last all my life? Is it not just to-day, or just this week, that I have to keep him out of their hands, but for the whole of my life? Or the whole of his life? There is some statue of limitation, I believe, but God only knows after how many years it applies. In practice, it is for the whole of his life. As long as he lives, I have to keep him in tutelage? I have to watch him? I have to prevent him from making a fool of himself? What a frightful idea! I had never thought of that."

It gave him such a sense of consternation that he felt as though he had a diver's helmet on his head, and the sweat ran all down the front of his bald skull.

But it cost him so much to admit such an error in his calculations that he soon found sufficient strength of mind to brush this idea aside, or at least to cast a preliminary doubt upon it.

"I'm losing my head too soon. There must be something to be done. I shall have time to think about all that later. What matters at the moment is to get out of the scrape we are in now. Once a case is 'closed' . . ."

He had followed the rue Beaubourg. He reached the rue de Rambuteau: to the left, an old-fashioned wine-shop; to the right, a café-bar, a more up-to-date affair, with doors wide open, a counter which you could see shining, and people standing there drinking.

Quinette approached the café.

He was still ten yards away from it when he saw Leheudry standing at the counter, with a glass in front of him, and

talking to the other customers – talking, indeed, with some animation, perorating.

“He’s mad – stark, staring mad! What the devil is he talking to them about?”

Quinette wanted to attract Leheudry’s attention without entering the café. But Leheudry was one of those fellows with feeble eyes who can never rise to the height of an emergency. He was not thinking about Quinette. He was thinking, alas, about whatever he was saying.

What was the best thing to do? Wait at the corner, or go into the café and be done with it? One way or the other, the risk of being noticed, and therefore recognised afterwards, was about the same.

Having thought it over, Quinette went into the café, but by the door furthest away from the counter. He went and sat down at a table in a corner. If Leheudry turned his head a little, he was bound to see him.

The proprietor, standing behind the counter, noticed the new customer. He shouted to the waiter: “Émile!” and pointed to the corner of the room where Quinette was sitting. Leheudry automatically followed the gesture with his eyes. He gave a slight start of surprise and stopped talking, looking rather sheepish; but he controlled himself well enough for the people around him not to notice anything.

“So that’s over!” sighed Quinette; “and not so bad, either.”

He ordered coffee, which he paid for at once. He drank it rapidly. Then he got up, pushing back his chair noisily, with a slight cough. Anyway, Leheudry had not taken his eyes off him.

Once outside, Quinette walked slowly. Before he left the corner, he had made sure that Leheudry was getting ready to follow him.

“Where shall we go?” the bookbinder pondered. “His place? That would be the simplest thing. But that old woman annoys me. I would rather she did not see me again. There’s the church. . . . Well, why not the church?”

This idea appealed to him because it was out of the ordinary. It was a pretty sound idea, too. It was certainly not in churches that criminals had their secret meetings as a rule – for all kinds of reasons, among which superstitious fear was probably not the least – and it was certainly not in the recesses of Saint-Merri's that the police were going to look this morning for the author of the crime in the rue Dailloud.

It was true that a Jew from the rue des Écouffes, or a moneylender going his rounds, would not go into Saint-Merri's either. No matter. Quinette had no further use for that personality.

"It wasn't so much a precaution as an amusement. Beware of amusements."

"What's bitten you? I was wondering where on earth you were leading me."

"Hush! Not so loud."

"I was very nearly not coming in. You're going to bring bad luck on us."

"Don't talk like a fool."

The north transept of the church was empty. Quinette found a dark corner, far away from any confessional or any door, but from which you could see people coming some distance off.

"Besides," he thought, "nothing echoes footsteps better than the inside of a church. We can't possibly be surprised."

"Sit down. This is a nice quiet place for a talk. But remember to keep your voice very low. If I nudge you, it will mean: 'Stop talking.'"

"Won't people think it's funny to see us here? Hadn't we better look as though we were saying our prayers, eh?"

"Not at all. Let's just look as though we were having a rest. The main thing is that nobody should overhear us. Don't you know how to whisper, without raising your voice?"

"No, not very well. It gets my lips all tied up. I can't recognise the sound of my own voice."

"You'll improve with practice. . . . Well, have you read the papers ? "

"I ? No. . . . Why, has anything happened ? "

"Only that the business was found out last night, that's all."

"By the police ? "

"Don't use words like that, if you can help it. Can't we talk in hints ? . . . Yes, by those people, of course."

"Oh, that's terrible ! . . . It was bound to happen. I'm done for."

"No, you're not."

"Have they got any clue ? "

"Nothing about one yet. There's something that rather annoyed me – the fact that I had to learn all this from the papers. To think that you weren't prepared to tell me all about it – me ! It's outrageous ! "

"It wasn't so much that I wanted to hide anything from you . . ."

"Don't play the fool with me."

"It wasn't. I assure you it wasn't. But it seemed to me as though it would be like making a confession. And once you make a confession, your goose is cooked."

"Well, whether that's true or not, your reason doesn't hold good any longer. So I hope you will be good enough to reply categorically to everything I ask you."

"I promise you I will."

"Because if you don't, I'm done with you."

"I promise you. But tell me – you're sure they haven't got a clue ? "

"Speak lower. You never take care what you're doing. . . . You don't suppose they are going to shout it on the house-tops if they have, do you ? . . . You weren't lying to me when you swore to me that they had nothing against you ? "

"Nothing against me ? "

"No description . . . no . . . you know . . ."

Quinette showed him his thumb.

"Oh, no. I swear they haven't."

"It would be a hundred times better if you told me the truth. It would simply mean that we should have to make our plans differently."

"No, they haven't. I swear it on my mother's head."

"All right. Another essential point. How did you come to meet that good woman?"

"That's easily explained. Six months ago I was trying to sell some silver spoons and forks. . . ."

"Oh, and where did you get them from?"

"Oh, I got them honestly. A pal of mine, who used to work in an hotel, offered them to me one day. Don't ask me where he got them from! At that time I had money, so I bought them from him - cheap too. Later on I wanted to raise some money. I thought of selling them again. The fellow to whom I took them - a little jeweller - said: 'Nothing doing.' Perhaps he was suspicious of me. But I kept on at him. Then he said to me: 'Go to Madame So-and-so' - giving me the address - 'she buys that sort of thing sometimes.' So there it was. I had a look at her little nest and what she had inside it. At the moment it didn't suggest anything to me. But, later on, it came back into my head."

"Then you are not well known at the house? The neighbours haven't noticed you? They don't know you by sight?"

"Not they!"

"The night in question - at what time did you go there? . . . Well? . . ."

Lechudry seemed to be seized with distrust again.

"It wasn't just to make me speak that you told me it had been found out?"

"See for yourself. Here's the paper. You can read it without opening it wide. It's folded at the place where the report is."

"All right, all right."

"Look at the headline, anyway. Well? Now do you see?"

" Yes. . . . Well, it must have been about four o'clock, or half past four."

" As early as that ? "

" Yes."

" And you had just left when you came to me ? "

" Yes."

" Why did it take all that time ? "

" Because I went back."

" Went back ? Whatever for ? "

" I hadn't been able to find the money. I'd left with a few trinkets, a bit of plate. It wasn't much. I said to myself : ' This is too silly '——"

" When you came to my place, you had no parcel with you."

" No."

" So, then, these things you're talking about—you hadn't got them with you any longer ? "

" I hadn't even got them when I went back there."

" What had you done with them ? "

" Let me explain to you. I said to myself : ' This is too silly. I didn't look thoroughly.' On the other hand, I couldn't very well go back with all those things on me. Suppose I met somebody. It was hardly six o'clock. It was still dark. Well, up against a wall there was one of those shacks, you know, that the workers for the city used to put their tools in, and a heap of sand. I stuck my parcel in between the shack and the wall, buried a little in the sand. Then I went back — there."

" But — the woman, all this time ? "

" She hadn't stirred."

" Oh ! She was already——"

" No."

" What ? Hadn't you—— ? "

" Only to stun her."

" Wait. Keep quiet ! "

" What's up ? "

" Here's a verger coming. If he happens to say anything to us, leave it to me to answer."

But the verger, before he reached the place where they sat, turned into the nave, made a sketchy genuflection as he crossed the centre aisle, and proceeded to busy himself with a branched candlestick.

"Well?"

"I was saying that I had only hit her just to stun her."

"What with?"

"A piece of lead rolled up in a rag."

"Which you had brought with you?"

"Yes. It's a gadget you use in printing-offices. I might have been searched. There was nothing odd about my having that on me."

"I don't understand. When did you hit her?"

"Right at the beginning."

"But the blood?"

"That—that was at the end. When I went away, the second time. All at once I saw her coming for me. She had come to herself. She seized me by the arm. You can guess how scared I was."

"The paper says that they found a — knife."

"Yes, I threw it down. I had picked it up just as it came to hand, when I lost my head."

"You hadn't got it in your pocket?"

"No, I tell you! It was lying there on a table, with the spoons and forks and the rest. Of course, I had made a mistake. I hadn't got my piece of lead ready any longer."

"Where was it?"

"I must have left it beside the bed."

"And there it stayed?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, that's a very bad business! It will be found. And, as it forms part of the tools of your trade, it will show them where to start looking."

"No, I'm wrong. I remember now that I put it down in the middle of a whole litter of things — glass jars, ink-wells, paper-weights . . . I even said to myself that a jar or a paper-weight would have done just as well — that it wasn't worth while to have brought it along with me. That's what makes

me think of it now. Tell me, they didn't find her in her bed, did they ? ”

“ No. Near the door, at the foot of the stairs. ”

“ That's all right, then. They won't think of going and looking beside the bed. ”

“ But with the rag round it — that will attract attention. ”

“ The rag wasn't there any more. I know — I started stuffing it into her mouth, in case she should scream. But there wasn't any need. ”

“ There wasn't any noise at all ? ”

“ At that time ? Scarcely any. When I went back, I knocked over a stand with a lot of knicks-knacks on it. ”

“ Which were broken ? ”

“ I didn't notice. ”

“ There's another pointer. They will think that there was a struggle beside the bed. ”

“ Or aren't they more likely to say that it was the old woman who knocked the stand over when she got out of bed in a hurry to run after me ? ”

“ Yes, that's true. . . . But at the end, at the foot of the stairs—wasn't there any noise ? Didn't she scream ? ”

“ I don't think so. But there I'm not so sure, because I had lost my head, as they say. ”

When they heard a noise of footsteps in the church or when they saw anybody approaching, they stopped talking. So they did when Quinette wanted to think.

A strong smell of incense was wafted about. Perhaps they were filling censers in the sacristy.

“ That smells like a burial, ” said the printer. “ I don't like that stuff. ”

“ Then, when you went back, the second time — how long was it after the first time ? ”

“ Barely half an hour. ”

“ A funny way of going about it ! And the second time you finally unearthed the — ? ”

“ Well, I found a little, anyway. ”

“ What did you do with it ? . . . Why don't you answer ? . . . You don't want to tell me ? ”

"I kept some of it myself."

"But what about the rest?"

Leheudry did not reply. He shook his head, knitted his brow, and half-opened his mouth.

"And the first parcel – you left it in the sand, behind the shack?"

"No, I picked it up."

"When was that?"

"Soon after I left your place."

"It was still there?"

"Who was likely to go and look for it there?"

"Nobody saw you picking it up?"

"It isn't a much frequented place. I waited until there wasn't anybody at all in sight."

"And now where is it?"

The other hesitated about replying again. Quinette stood up impatiently.

"Oh, what a fool you are! Let's go to your place. We can come to some understanding better there. The old woman be damned! Come on, come on! You go first. I'll follow a few yards behind you."

Quinette felt like talking much more strongly. He wanted to shake Leheudry.

"She may ask you whether you met me," he added. "Tell her you didn't."

"Oh, so you went to the rue Taillepain first?"

"Of course. Didn't you think I had been there?"

"If you would rather go somewhere else, I know another place where we shan't be disturbed. . . ."

"Tell me about it."

". . . There we needn't whisper as though we were in a confessional. The only thing is that we shall have to take the Métro. It's too far to walk."

"What station?"

"The Bastille. It will only take us five minutes. It's a bar under the arches of the Vincennes viaduct. There's a room at the back there, where the fellow at the counter wouldn't hear you even if you trod on a dog's paw. I know."

One day I tried to call the waiter by howling at him. He didn't budge."

"It isn't a place where many people go?"

"Who would? No. A few couples of lovers sometimes. Or some fellow who wants to have a hour's snooze."

"How do you happen to know it?"

"Because I worked at a printing-office in the rue de Lyon."

LEHEUDRY'S MISTRESS

“YES, I was just saying that you’re a fool.

You seem to think that, if I question you about money and so on, it’s because I want to do you out of it. Idiot! Even now you don’t realise that by hiding things from me you make everything I take the trouble to do for you useless. Still, your position is clear enough. If I drop you, you know how you will drop, don’t you? Body one way, and head the other, into the basket.”

The other turned pale. The hollows under his eyes seemed to spread, as though acid were eating them. He stammered :

“Don’t say that! Don’t say that!”

“I’ve said it now. I’m not going to waste my time pointing out to you all the mistakes you have made from the very beginning. Go on in the same way, and that’s how you will end. If they had you on their records, you would be arrested this very night. Thanks to your playing the ass, you will be within the next three days.”

“My playing the ass?” said the other, as though the word suddenly offended him. “I’m not such an ass as all that, perhaps.”

“I’m going to show you that you are just as big an ass as you look. The loot – either it’s at your place, or it’s somewhere else. If you have left it in your room, however well hidden you may think it is, your landlady can find it any time she likes, and you know what will happen then. If it is somewhere else, that means you have entrusted it to

somebody. Well, it's your life that you have entrusted to this somebody. Make no mistake about that."

"I trusted you, didn't I? I suppose there are other people in the world to be trusted besides you, aren't there?"

"That's ridiculous reasoning. It was a miracle that the man whose hands you fell into happened to be myself. Don't count on two miracles. Look here, I'll tell you myself where the loot is. It's at your mistress's. Yes, the woman you told me about - the one who came to see you the evening before you did the job."

Leheudry bent his head. He was full of admiration, of anxiety, of animosity.

"You see," Quinette went on, with bitter satisfaction, "it doesn't take long to see through you. You are the classic criminal. You run true to form. Any beginner in detective work could rope you in."

He flung his arms wide open.

"What's the use? There is simply nothing more to be done. Your mistress will just make a mouthful of it. She is probably selling it on the Quai des Orfèvres already. As for me, my duty to myself is to get out of it the best way I can. . . . Of course, I have a way out . . . go and see my old chiefs . . . and tell them . . . well, something like the truth, so far as that goes - that I took pity on you . . . that I had some sort of romantic idea of helping you to get away, by making use of my knowledge of their methods . . . but that you're not worth helping, after all, and that I'm sorry I ever tried."

"You wouldn't do that!"

"They would give me a fine dressing down, of course, but that would be all. An old colleague of theirs is still a colleague, whatever happens." (Quinette was playing his part without the least effort - so much so that he felt homesick for this past which might have been his own.)

"You wouldn't do that! . . ."

Leheudry, from being violent, almost threatening, turned plaintive again.

"You've got it all wrong. This girl of mine doesn't  
Ug

know anything about it. She hasn't got the parcel. She put it in her safe without opening it."

"What safe?"

"She has a safe at the bank – a safe-deposit, you know. It has a secret combination."

"Your mistress has a safe at the bank? What's this yarn you're trying to tell me?"

"Well, it isn't exactly at an ordinary bank. It's at the Savings Bank, in the rue Coq-Héron. Only a few yards away from the Banque de France. It comes to the same thing. She has a pass-book; and, along with her pass-book, she rents a safe-deposit for eighteen francs a year. It isn't very dear, is it?"

"But . . . what kind of woman is she, eh?"

"Not what you think. Oh, no – nothing like that. She's a business woman. She has a shop."

"Married?"

"Yes. And well married, too."

"She is, eh? And you told me that you had been hard up, almost at your wits' end, more than once. . . ."

"I didn't say at my wits' end."

"All right; but absolutely at the end of your resources. And this woman, well off as she is – didn't she help you?"

"Well, to begin with, I'm not very fond of asking women for money. You always seem to take me for an apache or a pimp."

"It's very nice of you, of course, to be so particular as all that. But there are people who would rather accept money from one woman than go to the trouble of killing another. . . . Besides, you could have given it back to her some time."

"No. . . . I haven't known her long enough. It would have destroyed her illusions about me. I may as well tell you that I passed myself off with her as being better than I am. I didn't tell her that I was a poor devil of a printer. She takes me for a man of good birth. I told her that I was an engineer."

"And she believed you?"

" Oh - well - she's young. . . . Besides, I didn't tell her that I was an engineer with a Polytechnic degree - not at all - just an engineer - an ordinary engineer, you know."

" But when she came to see you in your room in the rue du Château ? "

" I was supposed to be out of a job. She knows that it's hard for engineers to find a place. I had broken with my family and wasn't getting anything at all from them. And then, she thinks I'm only twenty-six."

" She seems a simple-minded young person, this lady friend of yours ! But to go back to the safe ? "

" Here's how it is. I told her that it was jewellery, family papers . . . and money that didn't belong to me . . . the most sacred things I had . . . that people wanted to get hold of these papers, to prevent me from coming into an inheritance. So that if she could put it in her safe for me, until I had a place of my own or could get a safe of my own . . . "

" She won't want to see what's inside ? "

" I'd be ready to put my hand in the fire if she does. She would think she was doing me an injury. Besides, what would she find if she did ? Just a few trinkets, and a little bit of plate. . . . "

" And money ? "

" Yes."

" In what form ? "

" Notes, mostly ; and a few rolls of twenty-franc pieces. One hundred-franc piece, three fifty-franc, and one forty-franc."

" One forty-franc ? That's very rare."

" I know it is. It's something I wouldn't part with."

" But what about family papers ? "

" Well, there are some. I put in some old letters that I had from my father to my mother. I'm an illegitimate son. My father was quite a gentleman. If she looks at them, she will say to herself that they may be intended for proof in connection with a question of paternity. Besides, as the letters are very well written, on fine paper and all that,

they will go to show her that I wasn't lying about my family."

"But what about her husband? Suppose he took it into his head to pay a visit to this safe-deposit? . . ."

"No. He never goes there. In any case, the pass-book is in the name of the girl . . ."

". . . Whom you have seen again, therefore, in spite of all your promises. How often have you seen her?"

"Just that once, when I gave her the parcel."

"You are lying."

"And another time, just accidentally – but that doesn't count. Twice at the most. I swear it."

"You didn't tell her anything about this – business? Nothing at all?"

"No, nothing at all."

"Hum!"

"No, I didn't, I tell you. Put yourself in my place. If she were just an ordinary bitch or anybody's fancy, I might have let myself go. But with a woman like her? I should have given her a horror of me. She was crazy about me. No. I didn't even have to resist the temptation to tell her. She is the last person in the world to whom I would confess anything of the kind. Because I'm in love with her. Just you get that into your head."

Quinette meditated. Then he said:

"Well, then I simply don't understand."

"What don't you understand?"

"Your – your action the other night. If the love that you say you have for this woman was as deep as you make out, it ought to have prevented you from doing such a thing. Obviously."

Leheudry seemed very much disconcerted by what Quinette had said. He opened his eyes wide and then blinked his lids, like a child to whom a schoolmaster has just put a question up to the standard of the next class above. Finally, as though by way of excuse, he said:

"I don't see the connection."

"Unless it was that you wanted to lay hands on some

money so that you could play your part as a gentleman better in this woman's eyes ? ”

“ Perhaps that was it . . . ” the printer conceded politely. But then he went on hastily :

“ Still, I don't think it was. No. That wasn't what I had in my mind at all.”

“ Anyway, it doesn't matter much. What does matter is that this woman is in possession – she may not know it, but still she is in possession – of formal proof of your guilt ; and, besides that, you go on seeing her at a time when you ought not to let anybody see you at all.”

Quinette paused ; then, in the same authoritative tone, he continued :

“ You will give me the name and address of this woman.”

“ But——”

“ I'm not going to have any discussion about it. I don't know what I am going to do yet. I must think about it. In any case, I must form my own opinion about her.”

“ What ? . . . Do you mean you're going to see her ? ”

“ I'm not sure. Perhaps. I shall find out what I can about her first. I haven't any more interest than you in trying to rush things. What's her name ? ”

“ Sophie Parent.”

“ And her address ? ”

“ 31 rue Vandamme – it's a street off the rue de la Gaîté.”

“ A shop, is it ? ”

“ Yes, stationery and haberdashery.”

“ Is her husband in the business, too ? ”

“ No. He's got a job.”

“ Oh, he has, eh ? I understand things a little better now.”

“ I met her in connection with orders for visiting-cards, which she received from her customers. Then she got the shop where I was working to print them for her.”

“ But in that case she must have known that you were a working printer. What's all this you've been telling me ? ”

“ No, she didn't. It's too long a story to tell you. When she came to call on my boss, I saw her ; but she didn't see me.

Because of the way the place was arranged. I fell in love with her from that moment. But, of course, she didn't know anything about it."

"All right. You can tell me the story of your love-affair later on. Oh, there's one point. You kept a certain amount of money yourself. Was it much?"

"No."

"For a man in your position, you don't seem to be too much of a spendthrift. It's one of the few merits you have. How much have you got left?"

"Less than a thousand francs."

"There's a good deal more in that safe you're talking about?"

"Yes."

"Twenty times more?"

"Oh, no!"

"Ten times more?"

"Thereabouts."

"Let's say fifteen thousand at least. I must know just how much it is. As for the trinkets and the other things of any value, of course, don't attempt to sell or get anybody to sell a single one for you. Or you will be signing your death-warrant. Do you understand?"

"What am I to do with them?"

"We'll see about that. You have rather too much money on you. That's a bad thing from every point of view. You ought not to keep more than a couple of hundred francs, say, and let me keep the rest for you. I'll give it back to you just as you need it. . . . Well? . . . You don't think I want to swindle you out of it, do you?"

"No," said Leheudry, tamely enough. "Besides, it's only fair that you should make something out of all the trouble you are taking."

"There's no question of that!"

"The only thing is that two hundred francs won't see me very far."

"You will be so much the less tempted to indulge in expenditure out of the ordinary. Exactly what we want to

aim at is giving anybody with whom you come into contact the impression that you are living from hand to mouth."

"That may be. But it was hardly worth while running such a risk, if I've got to go without everything."

"You can have your fun later on, when the danger is past. For the moment, we're living under martial law. Come on, hand it over. Seven hundred-franc notes. Seven hundred francs. Good. I'll write it down in my note-book here, so that I won't forget – without your name, of course.

"And now you must do just what I tell you, without fail. Take advantage of the fact that you are outside and in a neighbourhood where they don't notice people much, because of the stations, to get something to eat. After that, go home and don't stir out again until you hear from me. I'm going to get busy about your affairs. The first thing is to find another hiding-place for you. I'm sorry I didn't do it before. See you to-night."

He pulled out his watch.

"You ought to be back home within an hour. Don't stir out until you see me again."

HAVERKAMP'S PLANS AND  
WAZEMMES'S LOVE AFFAIR

THE landing, which was very small, opened on to little corridors slightly above its level. The floor consisted of wide and rather warped oak planks, separated by grooves into which you could stick your little finger, and crossed sideways, along the grain of the wood, by cracks half-stuffed with dust and wax. Here and there you could see, squashed and shining, the heads of the big nails that held the planks together, which now seemed to be a part of the wood, like knots tougher than the rest.

One of the doors gave directly upon the landing. Four drawing-pins, stained with rust, fixed a card to it : " Frédéric Haverkamp." Wazammes knocked, heard somebody say : " Come in ! " and opened the door cautiously.

Standing on a chair, whose cane seat he had covered with an unfolded newspaper, Haverkamp, in his shirt-sleeves, was engaged in moving piles of newspapers and old documents of all kinds, which weighed down the upper shelves of a plain wood book-case. The room was small and poorly furnished.

" Hallo, it's you, is it ? I was expecting you earlier. I can only shake hands with my little finger, because my hands are all dusty."

" I had to call at the workshop, because there was some trouble about brushes that couldn't be found ; and I didn't want it to be said, just when I was leaving, that——"

"Of course, of course. And your uncle – quite reconciled, is he?"

"Yes. At least, he's not grumbling any more."

"Well, now that you are here, we might as well take advantage of the fact to pay a visit to the boulevard du Palais. What time is it? Here, get my watch out of my pocket for me. My hands are too dirty. Ten past eleven. We have plenty of time. You can come and have a bite with me afterwards."

Wazemmes's eyes shone. Meals in restaurants already! A boss who wasn't tight-fisted, and adopted you from the start as his comrade in a free, spacious way of living!

Haverkamp opened the door of a narrow kitchen, obviously long unused and as black as night. He washed his hands under the tap in the sink.

"You'll see that things look rather better in this other place of mine. I haven't got it properly settled yet. They only gave me the keys a week ago. But I expect to be able to move in to-morrow. What day is this? The 12th, eh? Monday, the 12th. So to-morrow will be the 13th....

"I'm not particularly superstitious; but it might be rather too much of a good thing to make a start on the 13th in a business which may mean the beginning of quite a new life for me. So far as my own experience goes, I've never found that thirteen means anything in particular, either one way or the other. I've had backers to whom thirteen brought good luck, or, on the contrary, bad luck, without any question about it. If I make a start on the morning of the 14th, I shall have lots of time to be finished by midday on the 15th. You'll have to help me. That's all there is about it. Come along!"

"Don't you think anybody is likely to come while you are out?"

"No. Anyway, that fellow Paul will be here at any moment. I'll leave the key with the concierge for him. At least, he said he would come; but he is much less obliging than he used to be, now that he knows we are going to part

company. Still, my successor will be coming soon, and Paul has to show him the ropes.

"I shall not be sorry to leave this mouldy old place. Just look at that staircase! And the concierge's room! I'm all against not keeping up a good appearance, you know. When I think how many important businesses there are, in the very centre of Paris – in the rue du Sentier, for example – which have wretched holes for their offices, and all the deals involving tens, hundreds of thousands which are negotiated there! No; for my part, I think that's all wrong. . . . Let's walk. It won't take us more than a quarter of an hour. One shouldn't lose the habit of walking. I don't get exercise enough as it is. I'm at the age when you see some men developing a stomach. I have a positive horror of that. . . .

"Yes, I've been abroad a little – not as much as I should like. One branch of my family lives in Belgium. I know Belgium pretty well, and Holland too. Once I got as far as Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne. Perhaps that was what finally disgusted me with carrying on business in a shabby kind of way. It's just cheese-paring, and it means a short-sighted outlook. Nowadays people demand light, space, comfort – even a bit of grandeur. My fifth-floor apartment on the boulevard du Palais won't be very grand at the start. But the place has an air about it, and it's in a good neighbourhood. I'll improve it as fast as I get enough money. For the time being, I am keeping my furniture down to the minimum, so that I won't get into the habit of putting up with anything – faked furniture and all the rest of it. If I leave the space empty, I shall have to fill it with good stuff, some day or other."

They crossed the Markets.

"Let's turn down the rue du Pont-Neuf. It won't take us three minutes out of our way. I just want to have a look at the new Samaritaine building. I can't make up my mind about it. Instinctively, I don't like it. Do you?"

"I don't, either. It looks like those papier-mâché affairs that you see at exhibitions, except that it's steel."

"And even though it is steel, it looks just as flimsy as they do. But do you remember the Exhibition of 1900? Aren't you too young?"

"Yes, I remember it."

"Still, I try to find a good side to it. If that's the way things are going to tend, we ought to try to get used to them as soon as we can. It may not be quite finished yet. . . . There's a shop that's going ahead for you – the Samaritaine! They have found a new formula: cater for a frankly popular clientele, which other people more or less despise, and not with too shoddy stuff, either. The Cognacqs started from nothing. They say that Madame Cognacq is still to be seen walking up and down the counters, bare-headed, in a black dress, keeping her eye on everything.

"In any case, the site is marvellously well chosen for their purpose. Isn't it? Stand back a little and have a look at it. The Halles behind. On that side, the Place du Châtelet. The rue de Rivoli leading into the rue Saint-Antoine. From the right bank, and even from the left bank, all those streets and boulevards leading down here and coming precisely from working-class districts. For them, given their programme, it was an even better site than that of the Hôtel de Ville Bazaar or of the Louvre. Don't you see that for yourself? . . .

"Perhaps ideas of this kind are a little difficult at your age. But you must train yourself to them. You can't be too quick in getting the knack of them, in view of the kind of assistance I want from you. A Parisian boy like you has a whole fund of experience behind him. Yes, the Bazaar is rather too much buried in the poorer districts. All right if you want to buy a slop-pail or some screws or a broom. But what working-class women go to the Samaritaine to look for is clothes, materials, fashion. It's better for them to have the impression that they are a little way out of their own neighbourhood, that they have made a step in the direction of the fashionable world, but without feeling too much out of their element and being intimidated. The Louvre was already a bit too far to the west, from that point of view.

"And that leads me to think that, after all, this outlandish architecture of their new building may not be such a bad idea. People don't like things to be too severe. The lack of solidity, the lack of stability about this daubed ironwork doesn't strike them. What tickles them is the showiness of it. It attracts them like a new toy. Indeed, I'm rather surprised at what you said just now. It shows that you have an opinion of your own."

Wazemmes blushed modestly. He was careful not to say, or even to think, that he had only repeated one of Roquin's favourite remarks during his evening talks with his uncle Miraud.

They followed the Quai de la Mégisserie, where the stalls of the seedsmen and sellers of live stock began. They were to be found in even greater number the other side of the Place du Châtelet, on the Quai des Gesvres. Little coloured packets of seed. Tiny pots of flowers. Hirsute bulbs. Gold-fish in their bowls. A squirrel in a revolving cage. A parrot shifting from one foot to the other on his perch. Opposite, up against the parapet, the stalls of the second-hand booksellers, with their lids raised. In spite of the sun, the sellers, nipped by the wind from the Seine, pulled up their mufflers around their ears and rubbed their hands.

"I was talking about the Louvre. All the same, the rise of the Cognacqs is not so dazzling as Chauchard's. They are still shopkeepers. But look at him! Of course, it's gone to his head. But there was no reason why it should. . . ."

Haverkamp reflected, with his head a little on the left side, and his eyes resting on shimmering roofs, the lights on walls, the river in the distance. He avoided people and things in the way without looking at them. His tall body was agile.

"Anyway, that time is over. Don't misunderstand me. The big shops already in existence may go on developing. One or two new ones may even be founded, although—What I mean is that business of that kind is in slow process of coming to a standstill. You need to invest a lot of capital

at the outset, make a start on a big scale. Those are investments for financial groups ; and all that they can expect is a reasonable rate of interest. (Apart, of course, from finding jobs for their friends.) It was Dufayel who had the last idea with any originality and resourcefulness about it. . . .

"For my part, I don't see much of a future in that direction. What you want to do is foresee the needs of a period – the thing for which there is the greatest demand. Now, Paris, you know, is a city where people are very badly housed. Most districts are unsanitary. Picturesqueness is another matter. Eighty per cent of the houses have no relationship with modern life. At present there is building going on, but in no hurry – just enough to keep pace with the growth of the population. The day when the problem comes to be faced, when even a million Parisians realise that they are living in wretched conditions which no civilised country can go on tolerating, you'll see what a rush there will be.

"And there isn't much building-land available. Paris is quite small. I surprise you, eh ? But it's true. Paris is very small for its numerical importance. There are the suburbs, of course. But as long as the fortifications exist – and they are not going to demolish them so soon as all that – sites *intra muros* will be of exceptional value. The ideal thing would be to be able to rake in any quantity of building plots and also old houses which could be knocked down. It doesn't much matter where, so long as you pick your sites carefully.

"Of course, I'm not the only person who has thought of it, or the first, either – far from it. You, who live out Montmartre way – you may have heard what Lacour, Viguier, Madame Vildy, not to speak of Daval and others, have done in the last twenty years. I don't claim to have invented anything. But my instinct tells me that this line of business possesses immense vitality, and of the healthiest kind. The profits may be enormous, and the risks are negligible. There isn't a single site in Paris which has gone down in value for the last century. But in some places the

rise has been very slow – almost insignificant, if you take account of the steady depreciation of money.

“ Oh, if only I had capital ! I could draft a scheme that couldn’t be beaten. But I have to go slowly. We shall begin in a small way. I shall operate at the start on behalf of my clients – and we have to find them first. But I’m sure that, once I have developed a clientele, I shall be able to go in for operations on a large scale, and with almost as much freedom of action as though I were employing my own capital. It’s a question of asserting yourself, inspiring confidence, being able to speak with authority. To do that, you have to prove to people that you can see clearly ; and you have to make money for them from the start.

“ Now do you begin to see the kind of activity into which I want to introduce you ? It’s more interesting than cleaning brushes, isn’t it ? All this may be a little over your head ; but no matter. If you’ve got the knack, some of it will stick. Starting as I am, I can’t do without an assistant who understands what I’m aiming at – and who is keen about it. I have more chance of finding one in a young man with brains than in some old stick-in-the-mud. It will be you or somebody else. That depends on yourself.”

They were passing the post-office on the ground floor of the Tribunal de Commerce building. Wazemmes was on the point of saying that he wanted to go in for something ; but he did not dare. Haverkamp was striding along, looking at the building which formed the corner of the rue de Lutèce.

“ Not bad, is it ? One can well imagine a great lawyer having his office there. The Prefecture of Police behind. The Palais de Justice on the other side of the boulevard. No, there’s nothing hole-and-corner about it.”

He introduced himself to the concierge.

“ The carpenter has just gone,” she told him. “ He won’t be back until about four o’clock.”

“ When it will be nearly dark. What’s his idea ? ”

“ I don’t know. Probably he has another job to do.”

They went upstairs.

"There's one of our most terrible troubles in France : the difficulty of getting a job done. Things that ought to be done automatically, once the order is given. Nothing of the kind. You have to insist, to beg, to make yourself a nuisance. And nothing is ever ready when it is supposed to be. They haven't even the excuse of frank laziness. It's not that. They waste time. They have no idea of organisation. They busy themselves right and left, as circumstances suggest. It's the last man who catches them by the coat-tail who gets served. And badly served. No job is properly done. The customer, or the employer, wears out his nerves looking after all kinds of wretched details.

"In France you can't absolutely trust anybody even with the job of knocking a nail into a wall. You have to go back over and over again. You have to say two or three times, very politely, 'You won't forget my nail, will you?' And when the nail is finally in, you have to go back again, because there are nine chances out of ten that it is in crooked, or that it comes out in your hand the minute you touch it.

"The point of view of the workman who finally knocks in the nail is that you and your nail are a nuisance ; that he would like to tell you to go to the devil ; that, once the nail looks as though it were knocked in, you have nothing to complain about ; and that, when the time comes for you to use the nail, you can make the best of it, while he, the workman, will not be there to bother about it."

Wazemmes, who had only too much reason to recognise himself in this picture of the professional conscience, nevertheless was cowardly enough to endorse it. Or, rather, he was discovering a new point of view. He was beginning to share sincerely in the troubles of the directing classes.

Haverkamp opened a fine double door, with big brass knobs and wide mouldings. He smiled with pleasure.

"I'll put a brass plate here, five inches by four, at least. 'Estate Agency. F. Haverkamp, in two lines. I had an idea of a name like : "Seine Agency" or "Immobilia." But, when you stop to think about it, a quite simple designation has more weight. I am not aiming at the general public.

The people I am after are no fools. You can't get away from it that in the eyes of capitalists the Saint-Phalle Bank, for example, would gain nothing by calling itself : ' Bank of Europe and America. ' ”

The apartment consisted of a fairly large, square hall and three rooms, all spacious and well proportioned. Two, the entrance to which faced you, looked out on the boulevard and had a little balcony. These were the former drawing-room and dining-room of the apartment, to the left. They communicated through a double door. The third room, whose door was to the left of the entrance, was lit from the courtyard. To the right of the entrance, a little door led to the kitchen and its dependencies. The hall was not dark. It received light through the glass door of the dining-room and through an oval fan-light on to the staircase.

“ You see how bright and cheerful it is ; and compact, too. A fine ante-chamber, eh ? I'll put a few chairs in it. That's where we'll make ordinary visitors wait – people like clerks and messengers. Or, for that matter, in general, people whom I don't know. You will ask them to put their names down on a little paper tablet – oh yes, we shall have to get some sort of table, too – their names and what they want. You will bring the slip in to me. If I'm not busy, I shall tell you to show the person in here.” He opened the door of the drawing-room.

“ For the time being, we shall have nothing in here but two quite simple armchairs, and an ordinary table, which I shall cover with a cloth. Yes, also a few old magazines, which I can pick up on the quays. After that, I shall come and meet the visitor myself. A door that opens of itself, like a doctor's. That makes a good effect. Later on we'll make this a regular salon. For the time being, I'm concentrating a bit on furnishing my own office.

“ Here are those unfinished shelves. They are not so bad as it is. A moulding will improve them. The whole thing stained mahogany. The day after to-morrow they are delivering me a big desk-table, old-style, of mahogany and bronze, with an arm-chair and two odd chairs. I nearly took

one of those modern desks – do you know them? – cylindrical, in plain wood. But I decided against it. Reminds you too much of trade or some commonplace business. Doesn't do for a big chief. An agency like this must have a long-established air about it after a short time.

"Look how convenient it is – this door that communicates with your own room. Because I'm going to put you in here. Suit you all right, eh? This courtyard has as much light as the street. You've even got a fine view of the side of the Prefecture of Police. Later on we'll have an office-boy who will sit in the ante-room, open the door, get people to write their names down, and so on. You'll have to do all that in the meantime."

"But how about when I'm out? You said I would have to go about a lot. . . ."

"Yes, that's a difficulty. Perhaps I shall have to fix my office hours for the times when you are here. On the other hand, I shall have to make appointments to suit my clients. Then again, I may want to send you out at any moment of the day. . . . We'll have to see about all that."

It was not one of those days when life seems complicated and difficulties insoluble. Not only had he confidence in his destiny; he even stopped a moment to be grateful to it. A man usually taciturn, he was overflowing with speech. He congratulated himself that he had somebody young with him, to whom a kind of simplicity in his delight did not run the risk of making him look ridiculous. Still, Wazemmes could not understand him altogether. He was not quite young enough for Haverkamp to dare to confide to him his most intoxicating thoughts, which were those of a child.

"Isn't it fine to have all this! An apartment like this all to myself. These mouldings. These cornices. That handsome fan-light over the door. A salon with a big oval in the ceiling, just like rich people. I wish my uncle Maxime, of Wormhoudt, could see me here. That table they're going to send me. Mahogany – a fine wood, ever so much better than oak. The fun of sitting at it. I get up to open the double door. A good curtain, as soon as I can get one.

Wg

Young Wazemmes showing somebody in. My secretary . . .”

He could have stayed there for hours just looking at it and dreaming. He could have played at opening doors and shutting them again, at imagining a client coming in. As a matter of fact, would there be any clients to come in? That was something to worry about later.

“I’ve got all this. There’s no mistake about that. Whatever happens, I shall have had it. And I’ve got the money for it. Not a halfpenny of debts. On the contrary, still seventeen thousand francs ahead of the game, once everything is paid for. Seventeen thousand four hundred, about. I might have taken up my quarters here. There’s plenty of vacant space. That would have saved me the rent of my room. A couch in the corner of my office or in Wazemmes’s room. But it wouldn’t have been the same thing any more. Wouldn’t leave me these fine, square rooms. Wouldn’t leave me the big, neat offices of my Agency. It would have made the whole thing mean. Besides, where can you put all your stuff: clothes and trunks and all the rest of it? In the kitchen? No. I want to put a regular lavatory and cloak-room in there, later on.

“Besides, there are women to think about. I don’t want the concierge here to have any remarks to make about me. . . . ‘Monsieur Haverkamp? Oh yes, he’s perfectly respectable. . . .’ I don’t want her to have to keep her eyes shut, either. Besides, I have my rule: never have a woman sticking her nose into your business. Never let them know how much money I have, or even just how I make it. That’s the best way of keeping out of trouble.”

When they went out again, Wazemmes plucked up all his courage.

“I want to go into the post-office, just for a moment. Don’t wait for me, monsieur. If you keep straight on, I’ll catch up with you.”

“Oho, going to pick up a letter from a little friend of yours, are you?”

Wazemmes pushed open the door of the post-office. He had a feeling of anxiety, intermingled with cynicism. He was surprised that he should experience a sensation which was so complex, so unusual in him.

"There won't be anything. I'm sure she was only laughing at me. Still, there was no reason why she should ask me for my address. Well, what does it matter? With a job like this one I'm going to have, I shall have plenty of other opportunities."

Last Thursday, at nine o'clock in the evening, as they had arranged, he had knocked at the door of the lady of the 'bus. He was at once more self-assured and shyer than the last time; and he was more discreetly scented. No reply to begin with. Then stealthy sounds inside the apartment – footsteps, a chair being moved, a door shutting. Finally he saw the outer door opening, and the lady appeared, wearing a wrap. She whispered:

"Oh, it's you? I'm so sorry. I can't this evening – I can't, really. Come back on Saturday. Yes, at the same time. . . . But, to make sure, call during the day. Ask the concierge. . . . Tell her: 'I've come for the message from the lady on the fifth floor.' She'll give you a note from me. Till then. Off with you!"

Thereupon she had quickly pressed her very red lips against the young man's and shut the door again.

On Saturday he had called upon the concierge in the rue Ronsard immediately after lunch.

"Oh yes, the message from the lady on the fifth. Here it is. Give it to your boss."

The letter, written on watered blue paper, ran as follows: "I'm so sorry. Impossible to-day, too. The best thing will be for me to know where I can write to you. Give me an address. To keep the concierge out of it, write it on a bit of paper, and slip it under my door-mat, early to-morrow – Sunday – morning. You shall have my reply on Monday morning, if necessary by express messenger. I shall try to be free Monday evening. But at least I shan't have troubled you to no purpose."

Wazemmes had spent all his spare time on Saturday reading this disappointing, but flattering, note over and over again, studying its appearance and its style. It was the first love-letter he had ever received ; but it was as arid as a business letter. No heading. In front of the signature : " Yours ever " ; and the signature was scarcely a Christian name, but rather a familiar diminutive : " Rita." The paper and the name were distinguished, and even smacked of luxury, in Wazemmes's eyes. The style was easy and correct. The sometime Colbert student could detect no mistakes in spelling in it. There were only two or three slipshod punctuations.

But the handwriting surprised him. A bad handwriting, irregular, clumsy, with some parts of it hastily scrawled and others unnecessarily laboured. The laundress in the rue Rochechouart could have formed her characters better. Was this the way ladies of fashion wrote ? Or " bitches " ? Wazemmes remembered doctors who, in spite of their education, scribbled illegible prescriptions, so people said.

Meanwhile he asked himself what address he should give. " General delivery," of course. Apart from its convenience, the *poste restante* was associated with love-affairs. It emphasised mystery. It lent prestige. After going over in his mind the post-offices in his own neighbourhood, he recalled that there was one in the boulevard du Palais, a few yards away from Haverkamp's new offices. So on Sunday morning he had slipped under the lady's door-mat a note, folded in two, in which he had written : " 211 G, *poste restante*, Boulevard du Palais."

At that time the *poste restante* permitted the name of the recipient to be replaced by initials or figures. " 211 G " had appealed to Wazemmes because it might be the registration number of a motor-car – the car of which he might be the owner.

" Have you anything for 211 G ? "

It took long enough to look for it. Wazemmes was afraid that the clerk was not taking him seriously. " He thinks I'm expecting a letter from a kid. He isn't looking thoroughly."

"Here you are."

It was an express letter. The address was carefully written.

"MY DEAR,

"This time, don't be afraid of any putting off. Come at nine o'clock, without fail. I've made all my arrangements so that we can have a fine long evening together. Don't be angry with me because I had to put you off before. It was very much against my will, if you only knew. Tear this up; and also my first letter, in case you kept it. Loving kisses from your

"RITA."

"Without fail, eh?"

"Well, is your little friend still thinking about you?"

Wazemmes would have liked to make some witty reply; but he only blushed. He was intrigued, moreover, by Haverkamp's hat, which he had only just noticed. It was a felt hat, turned down, dark green in colour, with two rows of stitching on the brim, and the bow of the ribbon at the back – a product of the very latest style. Wazemmes had a sudden feeling that it was hazardous to hope to appeal to women without a hat on that model. He promised himself that he would buy one as soon as he got his first month's salary; and if he had dared, he would have asked his new boss to let him have an advance.

It occurred to him also that he must start shaving as soon as possible. The down which still covered his cheeks and chin was a public confession of childishness. But he was undecided about the choice of a razor. His taste for modern inventions would have inclined him towards the so-called automatic razors, which were just then coming into fashion; but, in the advertisements of these instruments, there was a phrase which had shocked him: "Razors for timid and nervous men." He had often heard his comrades in the workshop jeer at unhandy fellows who did not dare to use the traditional razor.

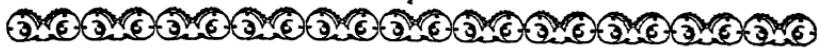
"Not to mention the fact," Péclet used to say, "that,

with a beard like mine, I bet you would use up a whole pack of blades without getting a hair of it off." Péclet's beard was not particularly stiff. But he took some pride in complaining about it. Stiffness of beard conveyed the idea of strength.

"There's another thing," said Haverkamp in a confidential tone of voice, "that I have been studying for some time, but I haven't got to the bottom of it yet. Either I'm making a great mistake, or it's a very rich vein. The property of the religious Orders. You've heard talk about it, haven't you? The business isn't new. There ought to be nothing left to make out of it. But still the same advertisements keep on appearing in the papers. I have a feeling that somebody has a pull. I've been following it out of the corner of my eye for several months.

"You see what I mean? We have the luck of finding a question of conscience mixed up in the normal interplay of supply and demand. Nothing will get it out of my head that plenty of people would be delighted to snap up certain bargains, if one could find an opening for them. Usually, in life, you find that scruples depend upon mere questions of form. You have to put yourself in the place of a capitalist who has to handle his wife, his mother, his mother-in-law, his whole circle of friends. Even for the sake of a big profit, he's not going to have himself put on the index. And even if he sees an indirect way of going about it, he won't take the initiative himself. If my fellow-agents think that people are going to come and ask them for such a service, they are making a mistake.

"That's how I explain the obvious lack of buyers. I respect sincere faith. But you are not going to make me believe that France is peopled only by convinced Catholics. In any case, there are always the Protestants, the Jews, and the Freemasons. Even they hesitate, when they belong to certain circles, because the proposition is badly put up to them. Or at least the few people who make up their minds expect to get fantastic profits for their trouble. That leaves us a margin for operations."

  
 QUINETTE ON THE "SCENE  
 OF THE CRIME"  


**W**HEN he left Leheudry, Quinette asked himself:  
 "Where shall I make a start? Pay a visit to the rue Vandamme? . . ."

But it was not a good time of day. The husband would probably be coming home for lunch. Even if Quinette had time to talk to the woman before her husband arrived, he would leave her more or less upset and in no condition to recover herself in a few minutes. Quinette, of course, assured himself that he would be circumspect. But how can you tell to what extent you are going to affect other people? The husband would be surprised, he would ask questions, and the woman might lose her head.

Was he to wait until the afternoon, with nothing else to do but get something to eat in a restaurant? But he was full of phantoms of things that clamoured to be done, which would haunt him during that pause. He could succeed in defending himself against them only if he gave himself the illusion that he was doing something all the time.

"Suppose I go and take a turn in the direction of that hovel?" He refused to recognise how much enthusiasm there was in this desire of his.

"The urge — by proxy — to return to the scene of the crime? Not at all. Nothing to do with it. I have a hard struggle to carry on against the police. My own investigation must be as thorough as that of the other side — so that I shall know how to meet them."

Quinette looked at the swing gate, and the passage which ran between the two low houses, at right angles to the street. The end of the passage seemed to be blocked by a wall; but there must be an outlet, to the left, which presumably led into that courtyard which the papers mentioned.

"Where is this hovel? Along there, probably, in this courtyard which you can't see."

Of the two low houses, the one to the left showed a blind wall to the passage. But the one to the right opened into it through a door and window on the ground floor, and two windows on the first floor. The windows on the first floor had their shutters closed.

The bookbinder turned round. The fruit-shop into which he had gone the other day and where he had received such a shock – "When I picked him up, he was still breathing" – was directly opposite.

"From that shop, and from the windows on the street, people can see me standing here and looking about. My curiosity explains itself. They will merely think that I have read the papers, the same as themselves. But there must be nothing unusual about the way I behave. The air of a casual sightseer. Almost a superior smile."

He decided it was wise to cross the road. He walked boldly into the fruit-shop. The proprietor was emptying a bag of white kidney-beans into a bin.

"Tell me, was it opposite here that the crime was committed?"

"So they say."

"It's a queer business. But I don't see this hovel that the papers talk about."

"It's at the back, around a bend, so they say."

"I live in the neighbourhood, but I had never even noticed that passage between the two houses."

"I have, because we've got it right in front of us all day long. But I've never set foot in it, further than the concierge's place."

"Oh, there's a concierge, is there?"

"Yes, in the little house on the right."

"It's a queer business. I should like to ask the concierge if she knows the details of it."

"She's an old fool. I shall be surprised if she tells you anything interesting. But you can always try."

Emboldened by this first step, Quinette crossed the street again, opened the gate, and found "Concierge" written in little black letters over a tumbledown door.

"Excuse me, madame. Hope I'm not disturbing you. I am a neighbour of yours. The bookbinder down the street, you know. I've just seen the papers. You must have had a terrible shock."

The concierge was a little old woman, very thin, very bent, with a hooked nose, and eyes that were still keen. She had a metallic voice, whose volume was surprising.

"You belong about here? So you do. I think I've seen you passing, you and that beard of yours."

She looked at him closely, not in too friendly a way.

"An old fool?" Quinette said to himself. "Nothing of the kind. Very wide awake, on the contrary. I should not have come."

He found some difficulty in continuing the conversation; but he made an effort.

"I live in a rather isolated little house, too. Rather like this one of yours. I can tell you it made a nasty impression on me. Made me say to myself all at once that one is at the mercy of any burglar. I thought the neighbourhood was safer than that. Of course, when you have lived in a neighbourhood for a long time, you get to think that it is not like others. Makes you ask yourself, too, whether the police know their business, doesn't it, madame? Considering that we count on them to protect us! I suppose they really did look into things, anyway?"

"They've sealed the place up."

"Oh, have they? Of course they questioned the neighbours?"

"They did what had to be done. It's nothing to do with me."

"Yes, of course, I understand that it must be disagreeable for you. I don't know anything about this hovel in question. I wonder whether it can be seen from my place. Is it in a courtyard?"

"Yes. But it isn't a hovel. It's a house — bigger than mine. And better to live in, too. Except that it's made of wood."

"Aren't you surprised that nobody in the neighbourhood heard anything?"

"How do you expect me to have heard anything, as far away as I am? To start with, I'm hard of hearing; and it happens to be in the left ear. And when I sleep — not that I sleep much; I don't even know whether I was asleep at the time — but anyway, when you are in the habit of sleeping on your right side, you're not going to change at my time of life; and naturally you have your ear buried in the pillow. I can't stay awake day and night."

"I didn't mean you. I was talking about the immediate neighbours, if there are any."

"Well, now I do remember a curious thing, come to think of it. But I can't recall whether it happened before Wednesday or Thursday. According to them, the crime was committed on Sunday or Monday. It upset me, all the same. I was here, in my own house. It was about nine or ten o'clock."

"At night?"

"No, in the morning. So far as I remember, I was coming back from a refuse dump that I have at the back. I haven't a right to it, strictly speaking. Because this house is meant for letting, too. The upstairs rooms. And the refuse dump goes with them. They aren't let at the moment. That's why the shutters are closed. I'm more to myself, that's one thing. But, so far as safety goes, I run more risks being alone like this, at my age."

"What were you saying happened to you?"

"Yes, I was coming back, and I saw—— Look at that wall behind you. That's right. Step back a little. A little more. Now, imagine yourself stuck right up against the

wall. I must tell you that I wasn't here, on my door-step. No, I had just gone into my room. And I wasn't thinking of looking out. Not to speak of the curtains. But, anyway, I caught sight of this man stuck right up against the wall. Gave me quite a turn. I went to the window very quietly. I pulled back the curtain, just a tiny bit. I don't know whether he saw me or didn't see. Anyway, he took himself off."

"It's turning pale that I have to be afraid of," thought Quinette. He said to himself, too, that his voice was going to tremble. But what affected it was less his anxiety than his overdone effort to speak naturally.

"You think that it was – the man who did the deed?"

"For the moment, as I say, it gave me quite a turn. But, still, it was broad daylight. People in the street. Nobody had said a word to me about what had happened. I ought to have thought about the good woman. In fact, I must have thought about her. But so many funny people called on her. I may as well tell you, I thought afterwards that it was some fellow who had come here to have a piss, but that when he saw me, he was afraid that it wasn't allowed here, and that I was going to tell him to get out. The only thing was, I ought to have said to myself that he didn't look as though he were going to have a piss."

"Would you recognise him?"

"I might."

"Did you tell the police about him?"

"No. Because I didn't think of it then. But I'll tell them now."

"They will ask you why you didn't tell them before. They will make trouble for you about it."

"Well, let them! I'm not afraid of them, I'm not. So long as one has an easy conscience. They're more likely to say that it's got nothing to do with it. Because it was daylight. They may think it has, though, all the same. Because they certainly told me to pay attention to the people who came here. They explained to me that often fellows who have done something like that try to come back, or send

somebody. So, if it really was Sunday or thereabouts when the crime was committed, perhaps he had come back to have a look."

"What was he like?"

"It's difficult to say, offhand. But if they brought him here and put him up against the wall for me, by way of reconstructing the crime, I think I could very well say whether it was he or not."

"Well, I'm sorry for you. You're only at the beginning of your troubles. It's one of those cases where one may be well pleased not to have seen anything or heard anything. And now I must be getting back to my shop. I like having a talk; but it doesn't get the work done."

"Wouldn't you like me to show you the scene of the crime, from the outside? Of course we can't get inside."

Amid his conflicting impulses Quinette hesitated until his head nearly swam.

"Come along. I'll just close my door. You can easily spare a minute."

When they reached the courtyard, to the left of the passage, the first thing he tried to grasp, to estimate, was the isolation of the hovel, its distance from its surroundings, the silence that reigned around it, the concentric circles of safety and danger, the desirability of its situation as a scene of crime.

"He didn't mislead me very much. The nearest neighbour is fifteen yards away. Except for that wall with one opening, which doesn't count. A stable wall. It is quite possible that nobody heard the stand being knocked over. Or even groans. There's a pigeon cooing somewhere now. If I was drowsing at dawn, behind that window up there, and the sound of stifled moans came to me, I might very well think that it was a pigeon. The door faces the blind wall. It would be easy to get out without being noticed, if you were careful. But probably he rushed out like a madman. From that window up there, somebody may have seen him."

The old woman was looking at him as though she expected some compliment from him about the place she was exhibiting to him.

"On the whole," he said, "it's not a bad spot. Your good woman had found a quiet corner. Only too quiet."

"The place is going to be vacant," replied the old woman. He pulled out his watch in pretended alarm.

"Hallo, past midday. And here I am amusing myself like a child with a toy."

He put his watch back ; then, without thinking what he was doing, he fumbled with his thumb and first finger in the lower left-hand pocket of his waistcoat. He found something unusual there : a box of matches. Just as he was going to pull it out, he remembered. "The cotton-wool." A shiver, which was not altogether disagreeable, crept over the skin of his skull.

THE PAPER-SHOP IN THE  
RUE VANDAMME

HIS courage nearly failed the bookbinder when he reached the rue Vandamme. Abruptly he envisaged the sequence of his actions as a kind of slide which, by skilfully devised turns, led to a precipice. He was doubtful, not about his own power of reasoning in particular, but about reasoning in general.

"Everything that I am doing is perfectly reasonable. Let anybody show me where I have made a single mistake, a real mistake. At least since this morning."

There was, indeed, that visit of his to the "scene of the crime," which might be a moot point. Quinette would not like to swear that he had not obeyed some impulse as blind as that which leads criminals into a police trap. But, if his action sprang from a suspect motive, it had an *ex post facto* justification. Was it not better to know just what the concierge had witnessed, what the people at that upper window might have witnessed, and just how definite, how unshakable, their testimony might be?

The only inconvenience of the step he had taken was that, in the concierge's mind, it might associate the figure of Quinette with the idea of the crime. But, through some paradoxical trend in his line of thought, the bookbinder found himself inclined towards actions of that preventive nature which consist in diminishing some great danger in the future that does not depend upon yourself, through the

medium of some danger in the present for which you possess the initiative and of which you can more or less keep control. If he got mixed up in the business, the concierge might be the first to say :

“ That gentleman down the street, with the black beard, who is such a nice man ? You’re crazy ! Why, a week after the crime, he didn’t even know the place where it had been committed ! I had to show everything to him and explain everything myself.”

Still, his courage nearly failed him. That wretched fellow, common sense, whispered to him in a trembling voice : “ Be on your guard against bold reasoning. You still have time. The further you go, the less time you’ll have.”

“ Twenty-one, twenty-three. It’s a few houses further on. Now I can see the shop.”

He slowed down. But when he came abreast of 31, he had still not made up his mind to go in. He wanted more time to think and also to get used to the locality of a fresh step. He went on as far as 37.

He had glanced at the shop as he went past. A frontage about three yards wide. The door was not in the middle. The biggest of the two windows, to the right, contained illustrated papers, a few specimens of writing-materials and haberdashery ; and also some advertisements, hand-written on small pieces of cardboard, at the foot of the window. The other window, much smaller, contained a few toys of the simplest kind and jars of sweets. A screen of illustrated cheap editions, stuck on the inside in two rows by wooden clips, masked the door.

He went back on his tracks.

“ I must reconnoitre first – see what kind of woman she is. I needn’t say anything.”

He pushed open the door. The action set the papers and clips making a noise of clapping and clicking which went on like a chime.

A plump little woman of about thirty, with round cheeks, smiling lips, a rather snub nose, unaffected eyes, auburn hair, not bad-looking on the whole, was sitting behind the

counter, in an attitude which suggested that she felt cold, with a black knitted scarf over her shoulders.

Quinette lost any sense of fear. He bowed in his most courtly manner.

"I have the honour of addressing Madame Sophie Parent?"

"Yes, monsieur."

He stroked his business-man's beard sedately and glanced around at the four corners of the shop. Then he spoke in the confidential voice of a lawyer.

"I should like to have a talk with you, madame - on a matter of some importance. Can we talk here without being overheard?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, I'm sure we can."

Sophie Parent's face was suddenly convulsed with anxiety. She went on:

"Is it anything serious?"

"It's serious enough, anyway; and it's nothing to do with anybody else."

"There's my back shop. . . ."

He glanced at the cluttered-up cubby-hole to which she gave this name.

"I think, madame, that we may very well talk right here in your shop. You are not expecting anybody in particular? Your husband is not likely to come home unexpectedly?"

"Oh, no! And at this time of day scarcely any customers come in. I do very little business until about four o'clock, when mothers are fetching their children home from school."

"Good. Anyway, if some nuisance of a customer turns up, bear in mind that I am the representative of a big Belgian paper-factory who has come to talk business with you."

He pulled a cane-seated chair forward, removed a little cardboard horse which was standing on it, and sat down, with his elbow on the counter.

"Well, what I'm interested in is Augustin Leheudry."

"Oh, my goodness! . . . Yes . . . I knew that was what you had come about. . . . Oh dear, oh dear! . . ."

"Don't be alarmed, madame. I am a friend of Leheudry's ; in fact, his best friend ; and, more than that, his lawyer. If I have come to see you, it is because I know all about his affairs ; and also because he can't come himself. . . . You know why, don't you ? "

"No."

"Really ? "

"No. . . . He certainly seemed rather funny, the last time, but——"

"He didn't say anything to you ? "

"No."

Out of his deep-set eyes, the bookbinder scrutinised Sophie Parent. She did not look as though she were lying.

"Did he arrange to meet you again ? "

"No. He said he would write to me."

"Where ? *Poste restante* ? "

"Yes."

"You haven't heard from him yet ? "

"There wasn't anything when I called there this morning."

"Didn't you say anything to him when you found him looking rather funny, as you say ? "

"I thought he was more worried than usual about those family troubles of his. I didn't want to add to them. Besides, we hadn't very much time together."

"Was that the time when he gave you — you know ? "

She flushed, blinked her eyes several times, and tried to reply in a natural tone of voice.

"No. . . . What ? . . ."

"Documents, and other things. . . . I repeat that I know all about everything, down to the smallest detail. You may imagine that I should not have taken charge of Leheudry's interests if I were going to let him hide things from me."

He lowered his voice ; then he asked :

"Have you read the letters ? "

"The letters ? No. . . ."

She added, defensively :

"I don't know what there is in the parcel. He made me

XG

promise not to open it. I wasn't going to open it, naturally."

"That's all right. I mentioned these letters to you because their contents would have helped you to understand how important they are to us. . . . Yes, that's just what I came to talk to you about. The parcel cannot remain in your hands."

"But I don't want to keep it. On the contrary."

"As his lawyer, I have some responsibility in the matter. I fully share the confidence which Leheudry has in you. But you are not by yourself. There's your husband."

"Oh, he never goes near the safe. It's all in my own name."

"Until the time comes when he suspects something. Suppose Augustin's enemies went and talked to your husband. . . ."

"Oh, do you think they would?"

"That would be disastrous for you, as it would be for us."

"But what's to be done, then? Tell me, monsieur."

"What's to be done? Go and get the parcel, without any delay, and hand it over to me."

She looked at Quinette askance and hesitated.

"I would rather give it to him in person."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"He can't go out. He's in hiding."

Quinette turned towards the back shop, as though he were scenting invisible pursuers there.

"In hiding? Has he done something wrong?"

"He got hold of the papers – and the other things – in a way that was – let's say a little cavalier. Against my advice. His enemies are taking proceedings. That will blow over. The essential thing is that he should not fall into the trap, and that the papers should be in a safe place. If you will trust me, we shall be able to settle the whole business at once."

He stood up. His authority radiated over this woman who looked at him so open-eyed. She stood up too.

"I shall have to shut up the shop."

"Just lock the door. There's no need to put up the shutters. We'll take a taxi. You will be back inside half an hour."

As the taxi was crossing the Seine, she made a great effort, and said :

"Listen, monsieur. You don't know how unhappy I feel. I swore to Augustin that nobody should touch his parcel, that I would keep it for him in my safe until the time came when he wanted it. It's all very well for me to say to myself that you are acting on his behalf ; but put yourself in my place."

Quinette answered her very gently :

"But that's very nice of you, madame – very nice of you. Of course, I quite understand. After all, you don't know me. . . . What are we to do ? "

"If you could come back another day, with him . . ."

"To begin with, we haven't got time. And, besides, they are on the watch for him. We should all be pinched. They would seize the papers, and our cause would be definitely lost. Not to speak of all the trouble it would bring on you. Examinations . . . subpoenas. . . ."

"What am I to do ? Oh dear, what am I to do ? We shall be there in a minute."

"We may be able to come to some arrangement. What is worrying you is that I should take away this parcel, which you regard, and rightly regard, as a sacred trust ? "

"Yes, monsieur."

She choked back her tears.

"What is worrying me is the risk he is running of being caught through some slip, through some unlucky chance. . . . In this safe of yours is there anything that belongs to you ? "

"Yes, my savings-bank pass-book and some bonds."

"How is it locked, this safe of yours ? With a key, I suppose, and a combination ? "

"Yes, a combination of three numbers."

"I know what we can do."

"What?"

"You take out everything that belongs to you. Keep it at home until to-morrow. You are not likely to have your house robbed between to-day and to-morrow. To-morrow go and rent a safe-deposit in a bank; and, as I am putting you to this unexpected expense, you will allow me to defray the cost. I believe that there are safes from twenty francs up in branch banks. To get your husband to sign a new authorisation, tell him anything you like . . . for example, that you have heard that there have been robberies at the Savings Bank, or that you would rather have a bank in your own neighbourhood. As for the safe you have now, in which you will leave nothing but Leheudry's parcel, you will give me the key of it."

"But that comes to the same thing as giving you the parcel!"

"Not at all. You know very well that, before you can go down to the vaults, you have to be identified and sign a slip. Can you see me presenting myself as Madame Sophie Parent? Besides, I'm not asking you for your three-figure combination. I don't want to know it. So, even if I could succeed in getting as far as the safe, the key would be no good to me."

"Then what do you want it for?"

"To be sure that nobody except myself can open the safe. Of course, you could make a declaration that you had lost the key and demand that it should be broken open. But why should you do that? To begin with, there would be an inquiry, delays, enormous expenses. Your husband might get annoyed and say that henceforth he would take charge of this safe himself. He might begin by taking an inventory of its contents. Don't forget, either, that proceedings have been started about this parcel. I should not be at all surprised, in case the key were lost, if a representative of the police were present at the opening. Well, can't you imagine the sequel, for Leheudry and yourself?"

"It's all very upsetting . . . very dangerous. . . ."

"No, it isn't — not if you keep quiet. . . . Your husband will think that you have given the key back to the bank. It will be exactly the same thing as if the safe did not belong to you any more."

"I might even arrange, mightn't I, to go and pay the rent at the bank a little before it falls due, so that they shouldn't send their letter of reminder to me at home?"

"The very thing! Besides, between now and then I shall have brought Leheudry to you, so that he can tell you himself to hand over the parcel to me. Or I'll get him to give me a note in his own handwriting."

"A note! . . . That's true! Why didn't you bring a note from him?"

"Because I was in a position to give you much better proofs. . . . I needn't tell you that I still have any number of other details about him, about you, about how you met each other. . . . If you want me to quote them to you—— You won't have any more doubts about me."

"No, monsieur, I believe you."

"That strikes me as much more conclusive than three lines of writing and a signature, which it is easy to imitate. Besides, in confidential affairs, I don't like too many documents. You never know what happens to them. I may add that a lawyer, when he undertakes a commission, is usually taken at his word."

"Oh, forgive me, monsieur! I only said that because of the principle of the thing."

They went into the safe-deposit department.

"Do you want to come down with me?" she asked.

"Of course I do."

"Do you think it's allowed?"

"I'm sure it is. As the renter of a safe, you have a right to bring anybody you like with you — provided that you are present yourself. . . ."

In the basement, women by themselves, wearing wedding-rings, and couples of small investors or retired people, sitting at narrow tables, were tearing off dividend coupons.

Sophie Parent felt herself seized by a frightful sense of self-pity that clutched at her heart. Why wasn't she one of these women ? How nice it would be to come down to this warm basement and look over the household savings, put them in order, and take care of them while your husband, who trusted you implicitly, was away at his work ! You would go away with a few coupons in your hand-bag. You would cash them at the nearest bank ; and then you would go and buy something that you had wanted for a long time and put it on the dining-room table in the evening, as a surprise.

Instead of that, she was carrying out a clandestine operation, which nobody in the world knew anything about, except this mysterious person who accompanied her. His mere presence seemed to her to be enough to diffuse through this basement, intended for respectable people, the air of a den of thieves. It was as though deceit, adultery, illegal practices, theft perhaps, and Heaven only knew what worse constituted her escort, led by this so-called lawyer with the black beard, who, out of all the gang, was the only one visible.

"How his eyes frighten me ! I don't dare look at him."

The eyes of the lawyer were nothing but two black signals at the entrance to a tunnel.

"I know very well that I shall never get out of it."

But where was she going to find enough power of resistance to save her from plunging into it ?

A SAFER HIDING-PLACE

WHEN the bookbinder found himself alone again, with the flat key of the safe in his purse, he asked himself what was his next most urgent business. Go straight to the rue Taillepain and see whether Leheudry was doing as he had been told? Tell him, at the same time, about his dealings with Sophie Parent, or as much as it was good for him to know? Overwhelm him with the prestige of such a success? "You see, I can make people do what I like." How would Leheudry look when he saw the little key?

"A gratification of my self-esteem, of my pride, which can wait. Besides, I must not show myself too often in the rue Taillepain. Go straight on with my programme: find a new hiding-place for Leheudry."

Though he had not really applied himself to this problem, Quinette had been turning it over in his mind for several days. Various parts of Paris, which he knew more or less, suggested themselves to him of their own accord. He had not subjected them to critical examination. He had been content to get the feel of them one by one, through a kind of animal instinct.

In many respects, some of them the most ordinary, there were conspicuous gaps in his sensitiveness; but he was very highly endowed with a scent for hiding-places. The mere thought of a street, a neighbourhood, at once provoked in him a reaction which was like a shiver, veering between the pleasure of security and the thrill of anxiety. Then, in a general kind of way, without any topographical detail, it

presented itself to him according to how deeply hidden, how hard to get at, how impenetrable it was ; or else in its quite different quality, as a centre of animation, where individual people were a matter of indifference, so fluid were they in their anonymity – the sort of place which may offer the same guarantees to the man who wants to hide. It was only after this that he found it worth while to use his reasoning faculty. He had not troubled to do so during the past few days.

Two of the regions of Paris which had come to haunt him most persistently were the eleventh district, in the direction of the rue de Popincourt, and the neighbourhood of the Nord and Est stations. He set himself to think about them seriously. Very different as they were in appearance, they presented certain advantages in common. First, that they were not traditional hiding-places ; next, that they were full of movement.

But what had associated them together in his mind was a more particular analogy. In the one region as in the other, Quinette recalled houses which presented a not very wide frontage to the street. Nothing remarkable about them to the passer-by. There was a carriage gate, always wide open, adorned with any number of business signs ; and, at whatever time you passed, it was very probable that a vehicle would be going through the archway. But inside you found a big courtyard, entirely surrounded by high buildings. On the ground floor, ten, twenty doors leading into workshops. Above, hundreds of windows. In the courtyard, a perpetual coming and going ; and into it, from the dreary upper storeys, there fell a mere sprinkle of glances casually directed downwards.

On the other side of the courtyard, opposite the entrance, there was another arched passage, probably with a vehicle going through it too. Beyond, another courtyard just like the first. The workshop doors ; the hundreds of windows. The coming and going. Glances which might, indeed, drift down from up there, but without seeing you, as snow misses you in winter. Who cared about you – whether it was you

or somebody else that was there ? Then a passage again ; a third courtyard. Sometimes another courtyard still, or even a fifth.

In the eleventh district the century-old house was black, the plaster on the walls peeling off, the traffic dense, and the people poorly clad. Every courtyard was a hive of swarming noisiness. The work that went on made up a composite sound of metallic beatings, of regular tick-tacks, of strident purrings.

In the neighbourhood of the two stations the corresponding house was only half a century old. Its frontage was in better repair. It had more offices than workshops, even on the lower floors. The courtyards, which were smaller, seemed relatively silent and deserted. Here you had not so much of the feeling that you were effaced, the illusion that you were not there at all. A glance which drifted down from the windows was more likely to strike you. But it took no interest in you and forgot you immediately.

"It is in one of those two corners that I must go and look."

While he was making his way towards a Métro station, he applied himself to a definite choice between them.

"So far as distance away from my place goes, it comes to the same thing. Obviously it's not going to be convenient. It would have been better to keep Leheudry under my thumb ; but it can't be done. Even within a certain radius around my place, I don't see anything that would really suit. Besides, it's not such a bad thing to get him away from the neighbourhood to which he is accustomed. The district where the stations are will take him out of his element even more than the other, especially beyond the Est station, despite the street-cars and the Métro. As it is more middle-class, more a clerks' district, he will have less chance of meeting men in his own line of business and striking up acquaintances. That is, if he doesn't break ground too much towards the north and go and pick up fellows in the boulevard de la Chapelle. I must go and see about all that on the spot."

An hour later, after various soundings, Quinette had discovered at No. 142a Faubourg-Saint-Denis, two court-yards back, a tiny two-roomed apartment which its occupant wanted to sub-let.

"It's going cheap," the concierge had said. "The tenant wants to get rid of it. He took it because he has a business in the north, and thought he would like to have a little office in Paris. He will let you have it fully furnished for the price that you would have to pay for it empty. I'm telling you the truth. I could have let it for him a hundred times over if it had been a little bigger."

On payment of a small deposit, Quinette found no difficulty about securing a sub-lease by the month. The concierge appeared to have full powers to negotiate – so much so that he asked himself whether she were not handling the business on her own account. Perhaps the landlord had let her have this little apartment in addition to her own lodge, and she had furnished it summarily. Perhaps, again – for she was neither old nor ugly – she had bestowed her favours upon the actual tenant, and, when he left, he had made her a present of the rest of his lease and the furniture.

In any event, the business was settled with an absence of formality which suited the bookbinder very well. He had only to pay fifty francs for a month's rent in advance and give any name he chose – which was M. Dutoit. He was also requested to make himself responsible for the furniture and fittings which were left at his disposal. The inventory of them was quickly taken : in the only room which possessed a window, a desk-table, two cane-seated chairs, a little round cast-iron stove, and some plain wood bookshelves which took up half one wall. In the other room, which was a black hole, a cot and bed-clothes, a cheap little three-section mirror, and a big trunk with a convex lid. Quinette was surprised at the trunk. He was informed that the tenant had used it as a wardrobe. The apartment also included a kitchen and, opening off it, a lavatory, both of them tiny.

During his visit Quinette vouchsafed a little information

about himself. He dealt in wall-paper. He wanted this place, not as a regular storehouse, but for a collection of sample rolls. One of his clerks would live there.

"He's a fellow who is not very capable, but I don't like to get rid of him, because he has no family, and I have taken him more or less under my protection. So I make the best use of him I can. He won't have very much to do here ; but he can run errands for me. Besides, I travel a great deal, and of course I have my album of samples with me ; but sometimes I haven't got them all, or a customer wants to see a paper in the roll. So it is very useful for me to have somebody who can send me any samples I want immediately."

All this he announced in an offhand, friendly kind of way. The wall-paper idea had come to him during his trip in the Métro. He knew a place where he could get rolls at thirty to fifty centimes apiece. It would, therefore, be easy for him, at the cost of a score of francs, to assemble what would look like a collection. From every point of view, the fable of this business struck him as convenient.

He added, just as he was going away, that he thought his clerk was a bit neurasthenic, given to brooding, preyed upon by his imagination.

"Not a bad fellow at all, so long as you leave him alone. That's one reason why I am putting him here by himself. The funny thing about him is that he seems a friendly kind of fellow. But it's better not to respond to his advances. Things only turn out badly if you do."

When he left the place, Quinette felt the excitement of having scored a particular success ; but he also felt a sense of anxiety at least as great.

"It looks to me as though I were setting up house with Leheudry."

Setting up house together, marriage, life in common, destiny in common – all kinds of promiscuities in the present and in the future – even in the past, retrospectively. There was here much matter for alarm and disgust.

"And all the expenses he's letting me in for, too! The fifty francs for the room. The five-franc tip to the concierge. The twenty francs that I'm going to spend on the wall-paper. And the repayment of the price of the new safe which I promised the little lady. Not to speak of taxis, Métros, and the waste of my time."

He remembered that he had seven hundred francs of Leheudry's on him.

"That's true, after all. I'm acting as his lawyer. It's only fair that I should charge these expenses to him. Let's just take the expenses to date. Fifty and five, fifty-five. Say, in all, five francs for transportation. Sixty. I don't want to be paid for the loss of my time."

He decided to settle this account immediately.

"Henceforth, to avoid entries in my note-book - which are unnecessary and might be dangerous - I shall pay the expenses which fall on Leheudry directly out of his own money. Of course, I must give him a reckoning for them, from memory. (He won't have the nerve to expect it; but I shall do it all the same, as a matter of principle.) And now I may as well pay myself back."

He had put the seven hundred francs in a pocket of his note-case, barely separated from his own money and papers.

This was not clean-cut, not satisfying to the mind. It lacked orderliness. Besides, the seven hundred francs, after all, were "proceeds of crime." They came direct from a murdered woman.

"Not taken from the body itself, probably. Taken out of a drawer or a safe."

Though he was not particularly conventional, Quinette was embarrassed by the feeling that the proceeds of the crime were in close contact with his own money, with his personal papers. It was a matter not so much of a specifically moral repugnance as of an obscure kind of fear of contagion; and this was less the contagion of criminality than the contagion of bad luck. Whatever one might think of murder in general, and of this murder in particular, there was no good reason why Quinette's money, Quinette's

papers, should share a common room, almost a common bed, with the seven hundred-franc notes of the murderer.

He went into a shop in the boulevard Magenta and bought himself, for five francs ninety-five, a common leather note-case, one of whose pockets closed with a snap.

"That's where I'll put the gold and silver of the Leheudry account. As for the copper, it shall go into the left-hand pocket of my waistcoat. With the match-box."

To pay for it, he changed one of the hundred-franc notes of the crime. They gave him back eighty francs in gold. He went out, saw a quiet café, sat down at the back of it, and proceeded to settle Leheudry's account in peace.

"Out of the money I have just changed, sixty francs is due to me. Here are three twenty-franc pieces. I'll put those in my own purse."

These three coins came from the shop, not from the scene of the crime. Accordingly, Quinette no longer had any trace of the proceeds of the crime in his own purse and his own note-case.

"Leheudry's note-case. First I'll put in the six hundred-franc notes, in the big bottom pocket. Now I ought to have, in coin, forty francs—less five francs ninety-five. That makes thirty-four francs five. Here are two ten-franc pieces, two five-franc pieces, two two-franc pieces, and five centimes. That's correct."

Then he found that the pocket with the snap held gold coins and small silver coins very well, but that five-franc coins would not fit into it without the greatest difficulty. Moreover, they made the note-case too fat and too heavy. Finally, the kind of superstition about the hygiene of the business, under whose influence he had just fallen, now demanded more radical measures. To keep Leheudry's money in the left-hand pocket of his waistcoat, in direct contact with his clothes, as though it were something of his own, meant condemning himself to an annoyance which might be slight, but would nevertheless be persistent. (Of course, there was the bloody cotton-wool. But that was shut up in its box.)

He went back to the shop, and, for one franc forty-five, made the further purchase of a purse.

"Now it will all be quite orderly, without any question about it. Leheudry's note-case in the inside left-hand pocket of my jacket. Leheudry's purse in the left-hand pocket of my trousers."

There was no further contact, no more division of ownership.

"It will make my relations with him easier. I shall be able to say to him: 'Do you want to know how we stand? Here you are. No possibility of confusion between my purse and yours.'"

Merely a drawing-account. Henceforth he would regard Leheudry as a "depositor."

But what about the match-box? What about the blood-stained cotton-wool? What place was he to assign to them in this new organisation of his?

He asked himself whether he should not throw the match-box down the nearest sewer. What restrained him from doing so was an idea which was also superstitious, but in a different way. The bloodstained cotton-wool was a kind of talisman. It gave Quinette a power over Leheudry; a power which was partly explicable, inasmuch as, in the last resort, the cotton-wool was a proof of the crime; but a power which was also partly occult, like the powers that magic brings into play.

Then he thought about settling Leheudry into his new hiding-place; and he came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to represent the wallpaper business to him as a serious business proposition.

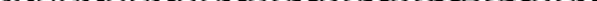
"He's too much of a fool. He hasn't enough strength of mind. If I tell him the truth, he won't be able to see anything more in it than an unnecessary complication. He will refuse to shut himself up there, with nothing to do. As soon as my back is turned, he will start making a round of the bars. On my way back, at the Hôtel de Ville Bazaar, I must buy a note-book with blank pages – something like a sketch-book. Or even a couple of them. At his expense,

of course. I'll get him to cut squares of the wallpaper out of the rolls, neatly, and stick them in the book. I'll tell him that I want to make a collection of them. I'll try to get him interested in the job, by making him classify them in order of price, by patterns, by colours, and so on. Doesn't a boy find amusement in sticking in postage stamps ?

"I'll tell him that, both for the purpose of finding him a hiding-place safer than that hole where he is now and of making use of him, I have decided to start a little business as a side-line. He may think it's odd that I should make him stand the expenses of getting it started, and also, since I am employing him, that I should not offer him any wages. Will he think of that ? If he does, I shall put the thing to him in a different way. It won't be on my own account that I am starting the business, but on his, so that in the long run he will be able to make an honest livelihood. It will be for the purpose of giving him a lift.

"That will be a good alibi, too, if things should go wrong. I must always be ready to face the worst. 'Yes, gentlemen, I was wrong in giving this man shelter instead of handing him over to justice. But see for yourselves ! Did I encourage him in a career of crime ? I did my best to win him back to a liking for honest work. Sheer idealism on my part, if you like ; but it was the idealism of a philanthropist.' "

Quinette endowed his thoughts with embodiment to such an extent that, without realising what he was doing, he went so far as to express them aloud. A passenger sitting in the Métro, just as the train left Les Halles station, distinctly heard the words : "idealism of a philanthropist" spoken by a gentleman with a black beard opposite him. He was rather surprised by the phrase, which was somewhat out of the common. But the gentleman with the black beard obviously had the air of somebody whose ideas ranged higher than mundane affairs. So the passenger politely turned his head away, just as in a tram-car, if you are well brought up, you avoid embarrassing a priest who is saying his office.



He might have gone straight to the rue Ronsard. But he found it a smart idea to take a little revenge, and a shrewd one to make her wait for him. What suggested so precocious a ruse to him? His own instinct? Something he remembered having read? Anyhow, the reverse side of this roguishness was a dread. He was afraid that this rendezvous would escape him like the others; and it seemed to him that he would be making himself less ridiculous in proportion as he was in less of a hurry towards his disappointment.

A quarter past nine by Dufayel's big clock. It was the third time Wazemmes had walked past. He might go up to the lady's now. His lateness was enough as a hint. If he went on walking round her place, he would warm up his body and make its natural odour reappear, at the expense of that highly scented freshness which the best bath in Montmartre had left there.

He rang. The five flights of stairs had made his heart thump as though he were thirty years older. If nobody answered, he would not feel very proud of himself. No sound of anybody moving inside.

The door opened.

"Ah, there you are, my dear! How late you are! Late already. Be quick and come in."

She was wearing a very flowery wrap, cut very low. It was she, this evening, who wafted scent about.

She pressed him to her and kissed him. Over her flower-covered shoulder Wazemmes could see the rows of books which adorned one side of the hall. He was cold-blooded enough to say to himself: "No, I'm not in a bitch's place." For it went without saying that the profession of a bitch could not go with any great intellectual curiosity.

But, far from reassuring him, this conclusion disconcerted him. What he knew about society did not enable him to find any exact position in it for a woman who was educated enough to possess all these books and brazen enough to accost a young man getting off a bus. On the whole, he was even shyer than the first time.

She relieved him of his hat and took him into the room where she had received him the other day. Again he saw the couch, the corner where he had made himself comfortable, the cushions against which he had leant. Her caresses, his own pleasure, became present to him once more. Suddenly his body was ready for them again.

"The dear boy! What a hurry he's in! But why shouldn't he be? God knows I'm not going to blame him for it!"

As a matter of fact, she was slightly mistaken. She  
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endowed the young man with an aggressive spirit, an impatience to press his advantage, which he was far from possessing. Wazemmes's feelings, born of memory, were of a passive kind, of a trusting and almost filial passivity. What he really would have liked was that things should begin again the same way as the first time. He thought he knew his rôle, which was not difficult, and he was sure, as much as anyone could be, of being able to perform it. A kind of inertia, if not actual shyness, turned him aside from desiring a new situation, which he would have to make up his mind to face. There was nothing to prove that he would emerge from it with his honour intact.

The curtains were drawn. The lights were shaded. There were plenty of books to be seen and near the window a big table covered with papers. The mystery of the setting and the lady, if it rather upset the idea of the feminine world which Wazemmes had made up for himself, was not of an intimidating character. As for the virginity which it was a question of his losing, it was not a very heavy burden. One could put up with it for a few days longer, or a few months longer, especially if it offered such compensations. Wazemmes had not set himself any time-limit. So let come what might. He was not such a fool as to spoil such pleasant circumstances.

But here was the lady performing operations upon him which he had not foreseen. In the course of lavishing kisses, caresses, and deep-throated, disorderly interjections upon him, she was taking off his clothes one by one. He had no idea what part he ought to play in this proceeding. Ought he to assist in it by standing or moving so as to save her as much trouble as possible? Ought he, as was quite likely, to return the compliment to the lady, whose own clothes, for that matter, seemed very ready to slip off her?

But the lady did not seem to require anything of him except to let her do what she liked. The little difficulties which she experienced served her as a pretext for coaxings, for hysterical laughter, for marvellings, for effusions. Wazemmes would never have imagined that it could be so

interesting to anybody else to proceed the other way round in that handling of suiting, of buttons, of underclothes, which struck him as such a nuisance every morning. It did not escape him that the pleasure which the lady took in it was too infallible not to argue something of habit about it. Her little cries betrayed not so much surprise as the expected return of familiar impressions.

"She's vicious," thought Wazemmes. He would not have been able to explain exactly what he meant by that. It was, indeed, a somewhat novel idea in his own mind. But he realised, very vaguely, that certain ways of behaving proceed from a source of madness which we have in us, and that habit, far from weakening them, develops the germ of delirium which they contain.

The sense of embarrassment which this feeling gave him was aggravated when he found himself stark naked. Happily, he was ticklish. The lady's assorted ticklings gave him shivers and infantile apprehensions which prevented him from thinking. He imagined that love was a game, full of teasings. Now and again he ventured to defend himself and strike back.

With his attention occupied by this little war, and his sexual instinct kept awake by caresses which came skilfully from time to time to remind him that, after all, a pleasure was in preparation for him, he found himself all at once overwhelmed by a naked woman, much more voluminous than himself, with her eyes shining and dilated, her breath panting between her red lips, and her flesh burning and throbbing ; and he was not so much dismayed by all this as he might have been.

He did not even think about taking note of what exactly was happening on his own side. Any need for presence of mind was spared him. He had no leisure to ask himself whether he would play his part properly at the right moment ; and, now that the moment was upon him, he was not in the least obliged to know what degree of merit belonged to his own body for a result which seemed beyond doubt. He would not have liked to swear that this was the most usual way of losing your virginity. But he was quite sure that he was in process of losing his own.

## II



### GURAU IS HEMMED IN



GERMAINE BAADER'S dressing-room was on the first floor – that of the “stars.” Germaine had had a great deal of trouble in securing it. When she signed her contract with Marquis, the manager of the theatre, she had forgotten to settle about this detail ; and one fine day, to her great indignation, she found herself being shown into a wretched cubby-hole on the third floor which had been allotted to her.

Germaine had not the resource of some of her colleagues, which was bursting into tears, or that of others, which was spending a night with the boss. She had to make use of the same patient tenacity as a civil servant who wants to change his desk near the window for a cosy corner near the stove. In her determination to win her cause, she had even asked Gurau to intervene with Marquis by a personal visit. Gurau had some difficulty in getting her to see that such a proceeding, which would have been awkward for him in any circumstances, would make him simply ridiculous, given the object in view.

Her new dressing-room, therefore, was something to be prized. It was, indeed, reasonably large, being about the same size as her bedroom on the Quai des Grands-Augustins. To the regular furniture which she found there – a dressing-table with a mirror, a second table, shelves, a cupboard, the whole white-lacquered – Germaine had added a fine Directoire cheval-glass, a Louis XVI

dressing-table, two armchairs of the same period, and a few knick-knacks.

On the walls she had fixed a number of photographs signed by actors and dramatists ; actors and dramatists who were chosen, not among those whom she had had occasion to know best or to whom she had rendered the best service, but among the most famous. Still, with that emphatic cordiality which is characteristic of the stage, the signatories allowed any visitor to her to believe that Germaine had been the favourite pupil of Mounet-Sully, of Sarah Bernhardt, of Réjane, and the chosen interpreter of Rostand, of Maurice Donnay, of d'Annunzio.

But, if the dressing-room did not look too bad – the old furniture gave the yellowness of the white lacquer and the dirtiness of the ceiling a kind of alibi – it lacked air and comfort, and the approach to it was sordid. The dresser had to go to the end of the passage for water. All its conveniences were of a piece with this. The doorman's cabbage soup, the reek of the lavatories, the solid puffs of scent which emerged from the dressing-rooms, engendered on every floor the atmosphere of a low-class lodging-house.

Germaine spent a good part of her evenings here. Although she had the second woman's rôle in the piece which was now being played, she appeared only at the beginning of the first act and in the third, leaving the stage at half-past nine and not returning to it until a quarter past eleven. This long interval was not always easy to fill. Germaine lingered over making up again, polishing her nails, changing her costume ; then she either read, gossiped with a colleague, or received a visitor.

This evening, Monday, October 12th, she had made up her mind that she was going to be bored. Monday was a day which she did not like, for various reasons, some of which went back to her childhood. In the life of a schoolgirl Monday makes the mistake of coming after Sunday and of not being as yet brightened by the dawn of Tuesday. Certainly the Sunday of the actress scarcely resembled that of the schoolgirl. But Monday was still distasteful to her,

because it was the day of a half-empty house and a jaded audience at the theatre.

About ten o'clock the doorman's son knocked at Germaine's door and presented a card : Jacques Avoyer. The name conveyed nothing to the actress.

" Did you see this gentleman ? "

" Yes, he's downstairs. "

" Is he somebody who has been here before ? Did your father seem to recognise him ? "

" No. "

" What does he look like ? "

" Quite a gentleman. Very good manners. "

" Oh, all right. . . . Send him up. "

A few moments later Germaine saw a man coming in who was about Gurau's age. He was rather thin, short-sighted, and bald, with the hair at the side of his head still very black. He was well dressed, but without distinction. Germaine had the impression that she had seen him at least once before. But this recollection was hazy so far as the circumstances were concerned. The only thing at all definite about it was the feeling which it evoked : one of slight boredom. The gentleman was probably one of those people to whom you hardly listen and who are not of much importance.

He was explaining himself :

" I don't know whether you remember me, mademoiselle. I am a boyhood friend of Gurau's. We were at school together at Tours. I had the pleasure of meeting you and Gurau one evening at the Café Cardinal. "

" Oh yes, I remember now. Are you seeing the show ? "

" The show ? - Oh, in the audience ? No. I intended to, but I arrived rather late. "

" Would you like me to get a seat for you ? "

" Not to-night, thank you. It would be a pity to miss all the beginning. Some other evening. "

Germaine asked herself : " What does he want with me ? " By dint of jogging her memory a little, she recalled that evening at the Café Cardinal ; this bald, short-sighted man,

sitting on a chair opposite where she was sitting with Gurau on the plush-covered bench. But there recollection stopped.

"I really came in quite by chance – or, rather, through a curious coincidence. As I was passing, I happened to notice your name on the bill-board, just when I was thinking about Gurau. I was just saying to myself : ' I really must go and have a talk with him and come to an understanding with him about it.' Wasn't that odd ? Then it came into my head that I might call upon you, naturally with the idea at the back of my mind that I might perhaps have a word with you about what I was thinking of. Because I know, apart from anything else, what a high opinion Gurau has of you, and how much he respects your advice.

"Perhaps I am being rather unceremonious. I'm not much of a diplomat. Or, rather, in the case of an old friend like Gurau, I don't try to be diplomatic. You understand, mademoiselle, that a man like Gurau, who has got on in the world through his own merits, who is coming more and more before the public eye, and who will go further – for my part, I can see him going very much further, if he does not stand in his own path – a man like that meets fewer and fewer people who try to tell him the truth, at the risk of displeasing him, but, at the same time, entirely because of their interest in him, in his career, in his future. For it is not always the man himself who is in the best position to judge in this respect, especially when, as in Gurau's case, he is a man of very high ideals, or at least very sincere ideals, even if they may lead him into being indiscreet, into putting the ideals of his party above anything else – or perhaps I ought to say his own intellectual ideals, his own philosophical ideals ; for I have an idea that he is not much of a party man, or at least that he is less so than some people, that there is nothing about him of the sectary, nothing of the man who does what he is told by his committee.

"And it is just for that reason that I think he is very lucky, whether he realises or not, to have a woman in his life who is not only a great artiste, whom I should have been

delighted to applaud this evening, if I had thought of it earlier, but also a woman with brains who can give him good advice. I am speaking to you very freely, perhaps too freely. But, whenever I think about Gurau, I still feel as though I were at school with him at Tours. You know what boys are like at that age – no standing on ceremony with one another. . . .”

He stopped, took off his glasses, passed his hand over his eyes, and blinked at Germaine in his short-sighted way, chuckling a little as he did so – a friendly, cheery laugh.

Germaine was trying to think of something to say, the kind of thing you do say to people like that, when he went on :

“ Am I taking up too much of your time ? Don’t hesitate to throw me out if I am.”

“ No. I’m not on in the middle of the play. Besides, you have come to tell me something, haven’t you ? ”

“ I don’t see Gurau as often as I should like, for one thing because I don’t want to bother him, and also because we are both very busy in our own ways. But I follow everything he does. The papers have announced that he is raising a question in the Chamber. I’m not telling you anything you don’t know already. He must have told you all about it. I may say that I should not have paid any particular attention to it if I did not happen to be very well placed, through the people I know, through the circles in which I have friends, for having some idea about the matters involved and about the difficulties – yes, the very serious difficulties – which they raise, and, indeed, the obstacles into which a man is liable to run and over which he may even break his neck. Yes, I repeat : break his neck. You will see for yourself that it would be ridiculous, when one has a future like Gurau’s before him, to be tripped up by a business like that, just for the lack of a timely warning.

“ Knowing him as I do, I’m not sure whether it would be quite wise for you to mention my visit to him – unless you could just bring it in casually in the course of conversation.

I simply want to convey to you my own conviction that some people, who have an interest in all this business, a financial or other interest, but who are much too clever to show their hand, have laid their plans to lure him on and then strike at him. He's been documented, so they say. . . . Well, there are two sides to every question. . . . The best thing would be to bring them together. I go so far as to say that it is his duty to hear the other side. It's quite a long time since we had lunch together, he and I. He wouldn't think it odd if I invited him. But I shouldn't like to inconvenience him, or to have him reproach me afterwards with having asked him to meet so-and-so . . ."

Germaine did not know what to say. She was conscious of an indefinite, but nevertheless unquestionable danger. The man who was sitting sideways opposite her might be of no particular importance in himself. But he had come there entrusted with powers which radiated through his own trivial personality. His studiously involved conversation did not make her feel like laughing at him. It was in Gurau's direction that she bent all her thoughts.

"How am I going to speak to him about this overture? How get him to agree to some kind of discussion? But still, I told him beforehand. I could feel this coming."

But she could hear Gurau's retort in advance :

"This Avoyer of yours is just a man of straw. A dubious kind of fellow. If he has the nerve to come and see me, I'll give him a kick behind."

Not that Gurau was a man impervious to reason. Germaine knew very well that he did not take the risks in this business quite lightheartedly. If they seemed out of proportion with the object which he had in view, or if he thought that he was being jockeyed into an unfavourable position, he might, perhaps, change his mind. But equally it would not do to let him think that the people in the other camp imagined they would have no difficulty about intimidating him or buying him off.

She made up her mind what to say.

"If you have been a friend of his from childhood, you

must be aware of the fact that he doesn't much like people trying to influence him."

Her visitor nodded his head.

"I quite realise that he is a man who has to be handled tactfully. That is the very reason why I came to ask your advice. There's one thing I want to do, first of all, and that is convince you – you, personally – that I am acting solely in Gurau's own interest. I'm sorry he has taken up such an unprofitable business. I could give you figures to show you that the campaign of which he is letting himself be made the instrument – quite in good faith, of course, and with that enthusiasm, that idealism, which I should be the first to recognise in him – has nothing substantial behind it. Besides, is there anything quite pure in this world? Is there anything quite irreproachable? Is it the business of a man like him to play the Don Quixote?"

"Take the theatre, even. Can you imagine an actor, however high his ideals might be, who would refuse to appear on the stage until he was quite sure, down to the last centime, where the capital of the theatre came from? For fear lest his art should be mixed up with anything in the least questionable? The idea's laughable, isn't it?"

He lowered his voice.

"In a man like Gurau, I imagine that his supreme ambition is to make his political ideas triumph. Isn't it? Well, I've nothing to say against them. But just you ask the radicals, for example, where they would be, so far as their power goes, and what their programme would be worth, if they hadn't a certain backing behind them. Ask Clemenceau, for that matter. Even struggles for ideas require money – plenty of money; and good will, and support, and shoulders to the wheel, now and again. Take the opposite case. Suppose you have always against you people who possess influence in all directions – who, in certain cases, have only to raise their finger, from a distance, to be obeyed in a hurry. We needn't be melodramatic too soon. . . ."

He drew his chair closer and lowered his voice still more.

" . . . But, as a matter of fact, you know as well as I do that Marquis's position is none too strong. Three or four years ago he turned his business here into a limited company. Theatrical businesses can be carried on with very small capital. But that didn't prevent him, pressed for money as he always is, from parting with some of his stock quite a while ago, and losing majority control. He said to himself, of course, that the stock would simply lie in peace in the drawers of friends and acquaintances of his who would not want to annoy him. As a matter of fact, at general meetings he has always got all the proxies he required. You can quite understand, of course, that, as a general rule, people who have no direct interest in the business and are dealing with affairs twenty times more important are not going to bother about questioning a man's control of a company on such a small scale, out of which they are not making anything. They have said good-bye to the bit of money which each of them has put into it, just because a friend asked them to, almost as a matter of courtesy. They barely take the trouble to sign the proxies that are sent to them.

" At the same time, if any one of them, for one reason or another, decides to acquire majority control, the thing is child's play. The stock is simply asking to fall into his hands. And what is fifty thousand francs, or a hundred thousand francs, to men such as I have in mind? A mere bagatelle."

He broke off and laughed in a queer kind of way.

" Don't have a fit ! But just imagine, if I chose, I could be your manager to-morrow. Laughable, isn't it ? . . . On somebody else's account, of course."

For the time being, Germaine did not attempt to argue with herself about the probability of the thing. She was satisfied with taking in, and taking in with anxiety, the threat that it implied.

" Either he or somebody else. They have sent him to me to make me understand just this : that if Gurau doesn't behave himself, they will put somebody here for the very purpose of making life impossible for me. I've only got a

two years' contract ; and, in principle, the clauses of my contract protect me. But two years is quite a long time – more than they need to injure me for the rest of my life. And there are hundreds of things that a contract does not cover. If they make up their minds to persecute you . . .”

Then she was afraid lest she might have betrayed too much anxiety. She forced a smile and assumed a tone of indifference, almost of rudeness.

“ You manager here ? It would take more than that to surprise theatre people. I suppose you know how to read and write ? Oh yes, of course, you were at school with Gurau. That's all right, then. Instead of you, it might have been a street chestnut-seller. I must say something about it to Marquis, just to see his face.”

“ No, no, please don't ! To begin with, it hasn't happened yet ; and it's not in the least likely to happen, either. Besides, all that I have said to you is entirely between ourselves.”

She treated him with a high hand. She had a sense of pride, of courage, which were unusual to her.

“ Oh, but I beg your pardon, my dear sir ! You did not come here to confide in me ; you came here to threaten me. Don't let us make any mistake about that. It is for me to decide whether your threats impress me. But as for my feeling, so far as you are concerned, that I am under any obligation of secrecy or anything of the kind, you must be joking.”

She paused to take breath, made her eyes flash and her bosom swell, and went on :

“ As for myself, of course, I am in the habit of taking things calmly. But when Gurau hears about your coming here, I've no idea what may happen.”

“ But he mustn't know about it ! He mustn't know about it, I tell you ! You're not going to be so foolish as all that. You may tell me, if you like, that I have been undiplomatic in the way in which I have put the position before you, that I have made a blunder. But I am only trying to do you a service. – Gurau and yourself.”

He seemed very much upset. Germaine continued in the same strain :

" He's quite capable of telling all about it in the Chamber, at the beginning of his speech, just to show to what lengths these gentlemen of yours are prepared to go in the way of intimidation. And towards a woman, too ! Yes, and he might write an article about it in his paper. Do you imagine that the scandal would hurt him ? Because people would know about his liaison with me ? But we've never made any concealment about it. I make my own living. Oh, I can assure you that your oil-dealers are going to have a bad time of it with public opinion. What do you take French people for ? "

Avoyer outdid himself in gestures of distraction and gestures of appeasement turn by turn. He passed the flat of his hand over his bald skull. He held out his arms at full length and flapped his hands towards Germaine like welcoming handkerchiefs.

" Mademoiselle ! Mademoiselle ! You are entirely mistaken about my intentions. It would have been better if I had said nothing. But now that I have spoken, I had better go on. You may judge for yourself whether I am acting as an enemy of Gurau's in calling upon you. You have just mentioned his paper. You could not have chosen a better example – or, rather, a worse one. Since yesterday his paper belongs to the people in question. That's all. They have simply acquired majority control. It did not even cost them very much. A poor little paper like that, with a circulation of barely thirty or thirty-five thousand, which owes I don't know how much to the printer, the paper-manufacturer, and its advertising agents ! "

" What ? Treilhard isn't running it any longer ? "

" Treilhard is. Treilhard will, so long as he does what he is told. Now do you understand ? "

He got up. His expression registered infinite regret. He added :

" Do you begin to understand how I happened to be thinking about Gurau as I was going along the boulevard

just now, and how, when I suddenly saw your name on the bill-board, it started an entirely natural association of ideas in my mind, which led me to call upon you ? ”

Thereupon his expression changed to one of pity. It was as though he were standing on a bridge and looking down at Gurau and Germaine, two unfortunates who were drowning in the torrent and thrust away the life-buoy that was thrown to them.

Germaine did not feel inclined to be rude any longer. She had no great courage left. She felt spreading around her, penetrating through all kinds of channels, fissures, and recesses in society, an occult, insistent power, by which she would be caught in the end, like a gnat in a trickle of resin from a pine-tree. She was thinking about herself, not about Gurau, which was selfish of her. But it never entered her head to say to herself that nothing would be easier for her than to separate her fate from that of Gurau ; so that this selfishness of hers was really only her own way of being conscious of her deep attachment to him.

“ But tell me, monsieur,” she murmured, “ what am I to do ? ”

“ Get him to see reason. It’s not too late. You will know best yourself how to go about it. I hold myself at his disposal for an interview. I repeat that, in principle, there is no hostility towards him. On the contrary, my friends would be only too glad to make themselves useful to him and to help him along in his career, as he deserves, because they look upon him as a man who is quite sincere, as I was saying, but not pig-headed. Honestly, I have a great deal of sympathy with him personally, and with his ideas, so far as they are practicable. But you really can’t expect people to commit hara-kiri. I’ll leave my address with you. You haven’t a telephone, have you ? Nor have I. I’ll tell you what – send me a special delivery letter, if necessary. Or perhaps I’ll call again. Anyway, we must keep in touch with each other.”



QUINETTE'S SLEEPLESS  
NIGHT



JUST at the moment when Jacques Avoyer left the theatre, sniffing the air of the boulevard – what he had on his mind did not prevent him from enjoying its nocturnal vivacity – Quinette was lighting the little lamp which served him as a night-light.

He had gone to bed early, feeling extremely tired and counting upon the relaxation of sleep. But sleep would not come to him. By way of compensation, however, the medley of confused anxieties, which had weighed upon him more and more as the day went on, gave place little by little to a more orderly view of things, whose very clarity was in itself comparatively soothing.

He set himself to recapitulate his day, to pass judgment upon it piece by piece. Some pieces were good, others doubtful, others again to be condemned. He achieved a nice degree of discrimination. His visit to Sophie Parent, for example, subdivided itself, under Quinette's attentive eyes, into a growing number of individual episodes, which he took up one by one, to examine them and give them their proper valuation.

It did not occur to him that an act such as that is something indivisible and continuous, in which it is vain to attempt to isolate such-and-such a detail in the judgment which you pass upon it. (One episode, which you may regard as favourable, only becomes possible because another,

which you find unfortunate, happened as well.) Temperamentally he took an analytical view of things. Besides, although he might contain within himself the seed of a deep-laid destiny, although he might even recognise the up-thrusting and the threat of it by more than one sign, the world which he envisaged in his reflections was a world of liberty, in which every action was the result of an individual decision and in which you could always imagine that one event could be replaced, corrected, by another.

This mental labour of his ended by driving sleep away altogether. As he found it more tiring to lie awake in the dark like this, he lit his lamp.

To the left of the bed, with its spotless sheets and blankets, lay the room, small, modestly furnished, but itself in perfect order too. His clothes were folded on a chair. His electric belt was laid on the night-table, beside his lamp and his watch.

"That business of the rue Taillepain is finished with—rather late, but satisfactorily enough. There's a place that's never going to see me again. To-morrow morning, at half-past nine, I'm meeting Leheudry at the corner of the rue Beaubourg. I'll take him to the Faubourg-Saint-Denis. I'll get him settled there. He's going to start cutting out his wall-paper under my own eyes.

"The business of the rue Vandamme isn't so far advanced, unfortunately. Mixture of feelings about it. Grounds for anxiety there—complications that may have a sequel. Mustn't let myself take anything on trust or be just lazy about it. . . .

"My visit to the concierge in the little passage? Good in one sense; bad in another. I am numbered now among the people who may be mentioned to the police as having visited, or revisited, the scene of the crime. But I had to find out about things. I found out something worth knowing. She saw Leheudry. Just a few minutes before he burst in on me. Could she give a description of him? No. Could she recognise him if they brought him there? She might. That's bad. She says she hasn't mentioned it to anybody yet.

But if she did say anything about it, however vague it was, it might become pretty serious. The looks of him. The time. The place. If anybody saw Leheudry coming into my shop after that . . . ”

Little by little his reflections decanted themselves. Minor difficulties still floated on top, but less and less perceptible and partially dissolved. Weightier difficulties sank to the bottom and monopolised his attention.

He bit his moustache. He fixed his sharp eyes on a flower on the wallpaper. He picked out a hair of his beard, pinched it between thumb-nail and finger-nail, and tugged it out suddenly, at the price of a pain that freshened him up. He went on scratching at that part of his body where the electric belt had left an irritation, and proceeded to sniff, with purely automatic curiosity, at the smell of perspiration that clung to his fingers.

One idea kept on growing in his mind.

“Leheudry’s coming into my place, on Tuesday, October 6th, a few minutes after he had been seen in the passage. Leheudry’s staying in my place – Leheudry covered with blood.”

In the course of the day this idea had floated around in his mind among other ideas. It was only one among all those other question-marks of anxiety which had flickered, more or less quickly, across the light of his inner consciousness. But for the last hour or so it had gradually become a kind of knot which caught up all the other diffused dangers.

Quinette tried to treat it with contempt.

“Of course if Leheudry hadn’t come to my place, or if he had gone somewhere else, these other things would not have happened – at least, they would not have happened to me. It’s simply silly to concentrate on a thing like that ! ”

But what obsessed him was not that all these other things had happened afterwards. It was the mere fact of Leheudry’s presence in his, Quinette’s, shop, on the morning of October 6th.

Why ? Because it was impossible to be sure that nobody had seen Leheudry going into Quinette’s place. Or, to put

it more broadly, because the presence of somebody at a certain spot, at a certain hour, is a fact accomplished once and for all, which may leave nobody knows what traces. There was nothing to prove beyond all question that these traces might not be picked up, that the fact might not be brought home. (Quinette's later meetings with Leheudry were also, no doubt, facts which had come to pass, facts accomplished once and for all. But there was infinitely less chance of their being discovered, or even suspected, so long as their first meeting was kept dark.)

Wipe out something that had happened. A fascinating thought ! To what abyss it might lead him Quinette as yet had no idea ; but around it his mind played excitedly. Wipe out an event ; wipe out a thing. Efface any trace of an "existence," in the widest sense of the word. Quinette was not thinking particularly of a personal, a living, existence. Nor did he feel any desire to destroy.

What tempted him in this direction rather resembled the intellectual attraction of solving a problem. He realised that he had some gift for researches of this kind. His bent of mind asked nothing better than to work in this direction. Already the first thrill of inventiveness had seized upon him.

But he had no leisure to dream as he would have liked. His obsession led him back sternly to a definite case. Quinette imagined a policeman confronting him. After some purely formal remarks the man said to him suddenly :

"Excuse me, monsieur. There is a *fact* about which we would like to have your explanation. Last Tuesday, about nine o'clock in the morning, a man came into your shop, who seemed to be very much upset. Now, this same person had emerged, a few moments earlier, from the passage which leads to the scene of the crime."

"But, monsieur . . ."

"There can be no question about it. This twofold fact is attested by two witnesses : the concierge at No. 18, and a woman who was shaking a cloth – contrary to the police regulations, as a matter of fact – out of the window of a

house opposite. This person stayed in your house for a good half-hour. What happened during that half-hour ? ”

Quinette framed replies, progressive admissions :

“ I don’t remember exactly. You say this man came into my shop ? Possibly. I suppose he talked about nothing in particular.”

That position was untenable.

“ Oh yes, I remember now. He wanted me to buy some pictures. I refused. He kept on pressing them upon me.”

But the policeman sneered.

Quinette fell back upon a version which he had sketched from the very first day :

“ He told me that he was hurt – that he wanted to have a wash. It certainly struck me as rather suspicious, but . . .” and all the rest of it.

The policeman countered :

“ It’s unbelievable that you should not have reported the incident to us.”

As late as yesterday a reply was still possible :

“ If I had heard anything about a crime, no matter how trivial a crime, in the neighbourhood, but . . .”

Since this morning, his silence had ceased to be justifiable.

He turned the question over in his mind.

“ Suppose this were the truth ; that, as a matter of fact, the ‘ stranger ’ did come into my place for the purpose of washing up, but that he remained the ‘ stranger ’ ; that he told me nothing, that I never saw him again. What should I have done, really ? Should I have said nothing about it ? Perhaps. But only until this morning. As soon as I read the paper this morning, I should have had a shock. I should have grabbed my hat ; and I should have hurried to the police superintendent.”

He repeated over and over again :

“ I should have hurried to the police superintendent.”

A voice of logic, metallic in its resonance, echoed in his head :

“ Then you must hurry to the police superintendent.”

He shrugged his shoulders. He protested.

"Ridiculous. An idea born of delirium. A product of tiredness and overwrought nerves. I refuse to consider it."

But consider it he did. He even went so far as to play with it in detail. He could see himself to-morrow morning getting up early and making his toilet carefully; then going out, making his way through the cool streets. He had himself announced by the policeman on duty. "To make an important statement." The superintendent received him and asked him to take a chair. He sought for words in which to begin.

At this moment he realised that his decision was already taken; that to-morrow morning nothing could prevent him from getting up early, making his toilet carefully, and going to see the superintendent. But he wanted to make sure just why he had to go.

First of all, he made confused replies to his own question.

"Because I ought to make the first move. I have a feeling that if I don't go to see him, he will come to see me. Initiative. Offensive. Choice of battlefield. Carrying the war into the enemy's camp."

Then his arguments stood out more clearly.

"The investigation is only just beginning. They still have quite open minds. The first information they get may prove decisive. My quite spontaneous testimony, besides diverting suspicion from me, may succeed in confusing the scent for good and all. What weight are witnesses on the other side likely to carry? A neighbour, half-asleep, who heard a noise? Another who saw Leheudry leaving the hovel from her window, a long way off? It would be too far off for that to count.

"There's the old concierge. That's bad. But it's bad only if Leheudry is arrested. Besides, I defy her to give a description of him which will be of any use—certainly not one which can stand up against the exactness of my own. My personality is bound to make a great impression. My testimony, thought out quietly by the only man in the world, apart from Leheudry, who knows all about the business, can be pitched at whatever degree of clearness, coherence, and

probability I think suits me best. Even testimony which may be forthcoming later on can be discredited in advance by my own."

He felt a great sense of relief. He felt quite at one with himself, almost delighted with himself. His bed no longer seemed hostile to him. His sleeplessness would persist, but it would be a fruitful sleeplessness, which he would employ in making and perfecting his plans and in which time would not count.

He had, it was true, one disturbing thought.

"Other people before me have tried to lead justice astray by cleverly faked testimony. That did not prevent them from being found out, after a period of following false clues, and ending on the scaffold. . . . Particularly in family crimes. Indeed, it has often been their own testimony, once it was recognised to be false, that gave them away.

"But in the first place, so far as I am concerned, whatever happens, there can't be any question of the scaffold. Don't let me think about the scaffold! Besides, in family crimes, for example, that famous adage whose meaning I verified in Larousse the day before yesterday nearly always applies: *Fecit cui prodest*. A valuable rule, even for cases of being an accessory. When the son-in-law kills the father-in-law, after disputes between them that everybody knows about, and the servant, who is the son-in-law's mistress, lends a hand, the mind of the examining magistrate is made up from the very beginning. The investigation serves only to assemble the proofs, and its apparent hesitations only to amuse the audience. The poor fellow's testimony is received with smiles. Apart from that, as a rule it is very badly put together.

"One strong point in my own position is that my participation in the business is in itself utterly unlikely. Even Leheudry, who reaps the benefit of it, cannot make head or tail of it. Another strong point is that I am cleverer than most people. Why should I not recognise that I am? The fact that I have not been successful in my career doesn't mean anything. Besides, you may be quite clever, and still

lose your head in certain circumstances. I don't lose my head. Since last Tuesday, of course, I have discovered that I do not possess absolutely complete presence of mind. But I'm not very far from it.

"At this moment, for example, my brain is working with as much clear-sightedness as though I were sitting in front of the plans of my single-rail railway. And if I spend to-night in drafting the terms of my deposition as carefully as possible, taking everything into account, even the danger that there might be in being too definite, and also the very slight air of there being something odd, something inexplicable, about it that one must leave around the incident, like a dash of garlic, so that it conveys the impression of really having happened – well, all I want is a cup of black coffee stronger than usual and I guarantee to be a match for all the police superintendents and examining magistrates in the world !"

This extreme clear-sightedness which the bookbinder felt – he imagined he could follow its radiation to the very limits of his consciousness. Nevertheless, it left perhaps the most decisive origins of what he proposed to do to-morrow in the dark. Of course, he did not ignore them entirely ; but he saw no reason why he should recognise them. He respected in them what a man always cherishes and protects above everything else : the mainspring of his innermost formulas of conduct, the trade secrets of his actions, which are really personal to himself.

In this connection Quinette had some weaknesses which he avoided confessing to himself ; for example, a kind of fear, belonging to the same family as vertigo, which led him, in the presence of the most threatening danger, to advance straight at it, less for the purpose of challenging it or estimating it than for the purpose of touching it, as other people touch iron or wood. So much so that his fondness for "preventive action," which had already taken him to the hovel in the rue Dailloud and to the rue Vandamme, was perhaps not so much like a self-defensive reaction as a superstitious rite.

He had also an almost irresistible desire to live through those dramatic scenes which imagination suddenly presents to you and which you can make real almost by raising your hand. Quinette might have given this desire a flattering name by calling it a taste for taking risks. Better still, he might have associated it with that itch to be up and doing which had taken possession of him that very morning after Juliette's visit.

But to-night, in the solitude of that rather chilly room, in those sheets not all of whose folds were warmed by his body, Quinette, tired after a long, exhausting day, distrusted any flights of imagination. He made up his mind that he would take no decision which was not fully justified by the light of reason. He tried to give himself the impression that he was acting without any enthusiasm, in obedience only to cold-blooded calculation.

So he had little chance of realising that perhaps his strongest motive was desire to come into contact with the police as soon as possible. Deep down in him, for the last six days, this desire had been growing all the time. Now Quinette was impatiently awaiting the moment when, in a small office, he would be sitting down face to face with a man who meant the police, who was a member of the police, a tentacle of the police, one of their innumerable pairs of eyes at the end of tentacles.

During these past six days, without his making any special call upon his imagination, the rôle of the police had been growing upon him as something more and more real, more and more haunting. He could sense them gliding along the streets, feeling their way along walls, fumbling about. They were clumsy, purblind gestures. But they went on and on, persistently. They were slimy gropings ; but, side by side with all this, there was the instantaneous circulation of ideas, of information, of orders from one end of this great organism to the other.

This vast, creeping quest does not interest everybody. Quinette had just made the discovery that some men are responsive to the police, that there is a kind of reciprocal

sensitiveness between them. Such men feel the police spreading their tentacles and approaching. The police feel such men recoiling and fleeing. Until the morning of October 6th, Quinette was not responsive to the police. He had become so.

In him this sensitiveness, so far, implied not so much terrified apprehension as curiosity, sympathy, an attraction akin to pity. It demanded that, instead of shunning the police, he should go to meet them, go and "throw himself at their heads." Perhaps in order to rid himself of any fear of them. Perhaps to try a very daring experiment; and because instinct counselled him to get used to the police, to learn, without loss of time, how to meet their proceedings, their threats, their attacks. (Something told him that his relations with them would never come to an end now.) But, above all, because he expected that this interview would give him a keen sense of pleasure.

"I might have been one of them," he reflected. "I told Leheudry so without making any effort at all. I can see myself as one of them very easily. All the qualifications for it."

His step the next morning might well be the manœuvre of an adversary; but it would also be the visit of a lover.

## CONTACT WITH THE POLICE

"I MUST apologise for disturbing you at such an early hour, Superintendent, and also for having more or less forced my way in to you. But you will soon see why. I think I have some interesting testimony to give you about this business that the whole neighbourhood is talking about. I refer to the crime in the rue Dailloud."

The superintendent, who was expecting to hear some commonplace complaint and preparing to listen to it without much interest, raised his head. He had before him, unquestionably, one of the most respectable citizens of the fifteenth district.

"I may tell you, Superintendent, that this has kept me awake all night. I nearly came to see you yesterday evening; but I hesitated about it. When you have always led a quiet life, as I have, you don't like thrusting yourself forward. To find yourself mixed up in an affair like this, however indirectly, is extremely unpleasant.

"Here are the facts. I am an art bookbinder. My workshop, and my house, happen to be situated in the rue Dailloud. I have a small but select clientèle. Not much coming and going. Not many new faces. My shop is a little sanctuary of work, and it would give me great pleasure, Superintendent, at some suitable time, to show you some specimens of an art which still preserves worthy traditions."

"Yes, I think I know your shop. It is on the right-hand side, coming from the boulevard, isn't it?"

"Exactly, Superintendent. I am sure you are a book-lover. You must have noticed some fine volumes that I have on display. Next time, please be so good as to come in. We must have a chat. I should like to show you, in particular, one or two illustrated editions of the eighteenth century, rather indecorous, but very beautifully done.

"Well, last Tuesday, at least I think it was last Tuesday – that would make it just a week ago – I was engaged in doing a delicate bit of adjustment in my workshop when I heard the street door of my shop thrown open violently. I hurried out. I saw a man, who seemed respectable enough, but whose clothes were dirty in one or two places, and whose hands were cut, or at least grazed. He was very much upset. He said to me : 'I have just been knocked down by a vehicle. Would you let me have a wash ?'

"I confess, Superintendent, that at the moment it did not occur to me to verify what the man said. I just glanced into the street, but I didn't see anything. Then I led the stranger to the tap in my kitchen. While he was washing himself, I questioned him tactfully. It seemed to me quite natural that he should be upset.

" 'What kind of vehicle was it ?'

" 'A motor-car,' he told me.

" 'Where did it happen ?'

" 'Almost outside your door.'

" 'But didn't the car stop ? Didn't they offer to help you ?'

" 'No. Besides, it was my own fault. I don't even know whether the driver noticed the accident.'

"Well, Superintendent, it all sounded likely enough. Even his coming to my place. There isn't a chemist in the whole street. Besides, I'm not suspicious by nature. There was one thing that did surprise me : a handkerchief covered with blood that the stranger took out of his pocket for a moment. But, as a matter of fact, that could be accounted for, too. I simply said to him : 'You've bled a lot.' He replied with something like : 'It's better if you do,' or 'It isn't anything serious.' He went off again in about twenty

minutes, perhaps, after thanking me. I thought no more about him. I was not even surprised that I didn't hear anything about a street accident. For one thing, I keep very much to myself. For another, these motor-cars have made us so indifferent, so used to being constantly in danger. . . . But you can imagine now, Superintendent, the association of ideas that came into my mind yesterday morning, when I read the paper."

The Superintendent hesitated a moment. Then he smiled, and asked :

" You think——"

" Oh, I don't say for a moment that there is necessarily any connection. There is so little, indeed, that when I read the news of the crime for the first time yesterday morning, or, to be more exact, yesterday at noon, I thought about all sorts of things, in particular the lack of security in a neighbourhood which seemed to me so quiet, and whether it would not be a wise precaution, for a man living by himself like me, to get a good watch-dog ; but never for a moment about my visitor last Tuesday. It was only in the evening, when I took up the paper again, that the idea came into my head. I repeat that I very nearly came to see you at once. I thought better of it, partly out of distaste for doing such a thing, and partly, too, to give myself time to think about it. Well, it has been racking my brain all night ; and I thought it better to come and tell you about it, even at the risk of wasting your time."

" Not at all. You are quite right. At first sight, I don't think there is any connection between the murder of that old witch and the visit of this man of yours. In the first place, the date does not seem to coincide. Nor the time either." (" Nor the time either," thought Quinette. " Good. The concierge hasn't said anything yet ; or they didn't take any notice if she has.") " The crime is not likely to have been committed in broad daylight. But people who think they have any clues, however doubtful, are quite right in such cases to communicate them to us. It is for us to follow them up. That reminds me, the inspector who is in charge of the

preliminary investigations ought to be in the next room at this moment. We'll ask him for his opinion."

The inspector, who was a man of about thirty-five, fairly tall, full-cheeked, reasonably agreeable, and looking more like a commercial traveller than a policeman, listened to the superintendent's summary of the bookbinder's deposition.

"Obviously, there's not much chance that this is the man we're looking for. But, as we have no clue so far . . ." (Quinette thought again: "The old woman hasn't said anything.") ". . . it's not for us to raise difficulties. Was your man carrying anything?"

"No . . . I really didn't notice. But I'm pretty sure he wasn't."

"Of course, he might have handed it over to an accomplice. That's assuming that he had an accomplice. What time was it?"

"I had been at work for some time already. I didn't notice the exact time. About the middle of the morning."

"Ten o'clock?"

"Nearer half-past nine."

The Superintendent intervened:

"That's just what I was saying to this gentleman. The times don't coincide."

"Only so far as our provisional theory goes. I recognise that it isn't easy to imagine the crime being committed in broad daylight. But the murderer may have taken his time about leaving the place, for some reason or other."

"The date doesn't fit either."

"I know the doctors talk about Sunday. But, if you ask me, you can't be sure within forty-eight hours. . . ."

Quinette interrupted gently.

"I thought you would have had some clue . . . or even some other testimony already. It's curious that the neighbours saw nothing, heard nothing. . . ."

The police officers did not reply. They seemed to be thinking.

"If the information I've brought you doesn't connect with anything, naturally it loses most of its interest."

"That's no reason for not following it up," the inspector went on. "Do you remember this man at all well? Could you give us a description of him?"

Quinette said to himself, in a flash :

"Here is the decisive moment. Everything may depend on this. Now is the time for all the thought, all the clever calculations, on which I spent the whole night."

A little before dawn he had written down, point by point, the imaginary description which he had decided to give. The piece of paper was folded up in his pocket. He could remember just how the lines ran. But he must avoid the tone of voice of a man who is reciting something learned by heart. Or, rather, while he was making one effort of memory, orderly and quick, he must pretend to be making another, much more groping.

"I think I can," he began, "though it's hardly in my line. More especially as he had a very striking face. His nose, above all – very hooked, it was ; and black eyes, under bushy brows. Thin, hollow cheeks. Rather a – how should I put it ? – Spanish air about him ; or even Oriental."

"A moustache?"

"Yes. Black, bushy, rather long."

"Forehead high or low?"

"Rather low."

"Thin in the face, eh?"

"Yes."

"About what age?"

"In his forties."

"What height? What build?"

"I was just going to say tall, but I'm not sure whether his thinness didn't make him look taller than he was."

"Just a moment, while I make a note of all that. In short, a kind of darky?"

"Yes . . . but not conspicuously so."

"Had he a foreign accent?"

"No. A rather deep voice . . . nothing out of the way."

"His nose was hooked, you say. Not broken, was it? Or with the bone very prominent, just here?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Do you remember any definitely characteristic marks ? Moles ? Birth-mark ? Pock-marks ? Scars ?"

"A few little holes in the skin, I think, which might have been pock-marks. But I don't remember now where they were."

"And his ears ?"

"Big. Yes, I should say very big."

"Any particular shape ? Pointed ?"

"Rather . . . I think."

(Hereupon Quinette thought of his own ears.)

"With or without a fold at the top, did you notice ?"

"No - I mean . . ." And Quinette added, with a disarming air of confusion : "I imagined that I had his face photographed on my mind. As a matter of fact, I'm hesitating about a number of details, as you see."

"But it's very good as it is, I assure you. The descriptions that we generally get are much vaguer than that. How was he dressed ?"

Quinette appeared to be thinking. During the night he had carefully debated this point. He had come to the conclusion that the best thing was to be rather hazy about clothes. If anybody had happened to see Leheudry coming into his shop, from a neighbouring house, for example, that witness would have observed the colour and the look of his clothes better than anything else. Why should Quinette run the risk of putting himself in contradiction with him ?

"There again I must confess that I'm embarrassed. The only thing to which I could swear is that he was wearing a bowler hat. . . ." (In mentioning the bowler hat the book-binder was putting himself in agreement, without much danger, with the possible witness.) ". . . Apart from that, he seems to me to have had a cheap ready-made suit. . . . The colour escapes me entirely."

"Yes, probably some kind of grey. Any other point you recall ?"

"Oh yes, he had a very prominent Adam's apple."

“ If you saw him again, would you recognise him for certain ? ”

“ I’m sure I should.”

“ Well, we’ll see about all that.”

Quinette stood up.

“ I am at your disposal, gentlemen. Though, at the same time, I hope you won’t want me.”

The inspector accompanied him out into the corridor.

“ That will depend on how the inquiry goes. If we obtain any results in quite a different direction, there is no reason why we should bother about your man. But if that is the only clue we have, we shall certainly have to lay our hands on him. And then we shall have to call upon you again. Many thanks, in any case.”

COUNCIL OF WAR AT DE  
 CHAMPCENAI'S  
 THE GURAU FILE, AND A  
 STRANGE LOVE-SCENE

IN M. de Champcenais's study in the rue Mozart the three men sat and smoked. In view of the early hour Champcenais, although he had only just had breakfast, was having another cup of coffee. Sammécaud had followed his example. Only Desboulmiers had chosen port.

"Avoyer came to see me as soon as I was up, and came along here with me," said Sammécaud. "He was in a hurry to tell me about the result of his mission last night. I nearly brought him up. But, after all, he's the kind of fellow that you have to keep at his distance. From what I have just told you, you will see that, on the whole, his report is optimistic. He claims that the meeting with Gurau can be arranged any time we like. All the same, don't let us forget that Avoyer isn't much of a fellow. The satisfaction of having a part to play, and the prospect of getting something out of it, may be enough to go to his head."

"Yes, I think he's going too fast," said de Champcenais. "He has done his bit of terrorising, no doubt; but he's done it to a woman. There is nothing to show that Gurau's reaction will be anything like the same, or that he may not think it beneath his dignity to look like yielding to such direct threats. In any case, we have shown our hand too much. We might have been more subtle and gone about

it more slowly. What about your conversation with the Minister, Desboulmiers ? What's your impression ? ”

“ I only got hold of him in the lobby, you know. For five minutes. And he didn't much seem to want us to be seen together. ”

“ What exactly did he say ? ”

“ He said to me : ‘ I would not have started that hare myself, because I have never wished the death of a sinner. But I'm bound to say that your cause is not a good one. If Gurau definitely raises the question I shall explain why the *status quo* has lasted so far. I shall defend the past system to the best of my ability. So far as I am concerned, it will be an easy matter. But don't count upon me to oppose a reform of the system of privilege which you are enjoying now – or upon anybody who takes my place. I shall even be driven to say – what happens to be the truth – that my experts were already studying the question of such a reform, and that Gurau's intervention has merely served to disclose our intentions. ’ ”

“ All up with us, in short ! ” said Sammécaud.

“ Looks like it, ” said Champcenais. “ This is a suit that we can win only on condition that it doesn't come up for trial. ”

“ You weren't so gloomy last week. ”

“ It's because I've been thinking things over since. Besides, Bertrand depressed me. He said that we were counting too much on parliamentary corruption. ”

“ As though he'd never made use of it himself ! ”

“ According to him, all that you can get a deputy to do for money is vote with enthusiasm the same way that he would have voted, without enthusiasm, anyway ; or, at the most, vote on an occasion when he would otherwise have abstained. Or, again, agree to keep quiet at a time when neither anybody nor anything requires him to do anything else. ”

“ But isn't that all we want ? ”

“ Yes, so far as Gurau is concerned ; Gurau and nobody else. For it becomes clearer and clearer all the time that the

key to the situation is Gurau, and nobody else but Gurau. So much so, that I simply can't believe that he doesn't realise it himself. That man is too clever not to know that he has got us. He needs to make only the smallest effort to strangle us. He has his finger on our carotid artery. And perhaps there isn't in the whole of France, just at this moment, any association, representing such big interests, which is as vulnerable as we are. It's no mere matter of chance that this blow is being aimed at us."

"I don't see what conclusion you're asking us to draw."

"Nor do I. I'm just feeling my way. I'm just trying to get at the facts. It isn't even a question that comes into his normal sphere of operations. He has no direct electoral interest in it. Trying to embarrass the government? No, not in a connection like this. Is he in need of money, and is he trying to make us pay up? Is there somebody behind him? I hope to be in a position to answer these questions more clearly within the next hour or so."

"What do you mean?"

"This is strictly between ourselves, eh? Because I'm sworn to secrecy. I have an appointment at the Prefecture of Police, at ten o'clock sharp."

He drew his chair closer and lowered his voice.

"I'm going to have a look at what information they have in their files there about Gurau. Thanks to a junior clerk. It's going to cost us a thousand-franc note. I thought I could commit us to that expense without consulting you."

"I could have got that for nothing, through a clerk who isn't a junior."

"All right. I'll pay the thousand francs myself."

"Don't be silly."

"Anyway, we may need this clerk of yours who isn't a junior later on. If he is a man who could really give us a helping hand. . . . Twenty-five minutes to ten. I think I'd better be starting. Can I give either of you a lift? Oh, you've got your own car, Desboulmiers? Then let's meet at half-past twelve, at my club. I hope I'll have some news worth hearing for you."

Champcenais had been waiting for about five minutes on a leather bench, up against the glass-fronted pen where the door-keeper sat, when he saw the man he had come to meet sticking his head furtively into the lobby.

He was a man getting on in years, with a heavy moustache, turning grey, and hair, cut short and brushed straight back, that was nearly white. He had rather large eyes, which looked more penetrating than they really were behind their glasses. His jacket had seen better days. He wore a very high turnover collar, with a ready-made ascot cravat.

He gave Champcenais an astonishingly limp handshake, making sure that there was nobody in the door-keeper's room as he did so.

"Follow me," he muttered. "If we meet anybody, pretend that you're not with me."

Champcenais was rather annoyed. "All this fuss! He's trying to make the most of the small service he's doing me."

The other led the way along two or three corridors, stopped at a door with frosted glass, listened a moment, and then went into the room, signalling to Champcenais to come in too.

It was an ordinary civil-service office, intended for two clerks. The two desks were side by side.

The clerk drew up, a little distance away from his own desk, a chair which he offered to his visitor. He sat down himself, coughed, and rubbed his hands together.

"I asked you to come at this time," he said in a voice which was completely colourless, "because I knew my colleague would not be here. I need scarcely tell you that it would be a very serious matter for me if this came to light."

"Then, monsieur, I am very sorry that I have put you to all this trouble and all this risk. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine can get me what I want quite easily through a senior official whom he happens to know——"

"I - I haven't any idea——"

"But I can assure you——"

"I haven't the least idea what may have been communicated to this friend of yours. There are files and files, of course. Besides, did this friend of yours mention the name of the person in whom he happened to be interested? It wasn't Monsieur Durand, the umbrella-seller, was it?"

He stopped for a moment, coughed again, and went on :

"Well, it's just as you like. If you think you can obtain the same information through another channel, don't have any hesitation about saying so. It would be rather a relief to me, on the whole. I really wouldn't mind having wasted my time making these inquiries for nothing."

Champcenais, who was quick-tempered, was at the point of taking him at his word. But he reflected that Sammécaud might have vaunted himself too highly. There were so many people who claimed that they could open any door to you, but faded away when it came to the point.

"No. I have no desire to have wasted your time for nothing. But I am sure your chiefs haven't the same scruples as you. Besides, you are not dealing with a child, or with anybody who can't hold his tongue, either."

The clerk opened the left-hand drawer of his desk, and with surprising sleight-of-hand took out something that looked like a bundle of papers, but whose dimensions and colour Champcenais had not even time to notice. Then, raising the top part of a big leather-mounted blotter, he turned this screen towards Champcenais, hiding the file behind it.

"Listen to me," he whispered. "I'm not going to talk very loud. If anybody comes in, I shall hastily change the conversation to the threatening letters which you are supposed to have received. You'll play up, won't you?"

"But," said Champcenais, rather taken aback, "aren't you going to let me have a look at the file myself?"

"No . . . no . . ."

"Then just what do you think you're doing?"

"I'll read what's in it to you."

"I'm sorry, but the only thing that interests me, if you don't mind my saying so, is seeing what's in it with my own eyes. . . ."

"You don't imagine that I'm going to make it up as I go along?"

"No, but you might pick and choose out of it. . . . In any case, I simply don't understand you. Your other precautions may be all right, but this one is ridiculous."

"If you were in my place, you would find it quite sensible."

"In what way?"

"Obviously, my dear sir. Like this, there is one thing that you will never be able to say : that you have had the file in your hands yourself."

"But this is simply childish."

"Suit yourself."

Champcenais found himself up against such a resistant alloy of obstinacy and fear on the part of the clerk that there was nothing to be done but come to terms or else get up and go.

"Listen to me. You mustn't take notes, if you don't mind. I'm sorry that I have to be so strict about it ; but I repeat that all this is much more serious than you seem to think."

Still hiding it behind his big leather screen, he ran his eyes over the file, turning one page of it after another.

"Well? Aren't you going to read it to me?"

"Yes. I'm just looking for where to begin."

"Begin at the beginning."

"It isn't in very good order."

"Still another precaution," thought Champcenais. "He doesn't even want me to know in what way the document is drafted. Well, let's be patient. If he tries to make too much of a fool of me, I'll just offer him a couple of hundred francs for the whole doings."

"Here we are. . . . It's a question of the descent of - you know whom. I don't suppose it will interest you very much. His father was a clerk of the court. Born at Belfort,

this father of his. Of Alsatian stock ; or he may even have been a German, from the Grand Duchy of Baden."

"But of course. That interests me tremendously. German stock, eh? A man who specialises in foreign affairs!"

"Not so loud! . . . There's no definite proof of it. Our files contain all kinds of reports, you know. There's a further report about illegitimate birth. According to this, he was the son, not of the clerk of the court in question, but of a judge at Tours. The father was Recorder of Tours at the time. Don't try and make too much out of that, either. It is alleged that the judge paid for the youngster's schooling. But, in the first place, we should need to have documentation about this judge. His name conveys nothing to me, but he probably left an irreproachable reputation behind him at Tours. He may have been a public benefactor, a man well known for his good works.

"They're simply pitfalls, you know, these files of ours. I've known more than one would-be clever fellow who has got himself into fine trouble by using them as they shouldn't be used. Our chiefs here distrust them like poison. We had better get on to the gentleman's career. Here we are. But wait a moment. Here again you never know where you are. I find a statement here that he is a Freemason, with the name of his lodge. And in the margin is a note, added by one of our staff, which I may as well read to you. 'Information incorrect. G. has never belonged to Freemasonry, of any rite. The mistake may arise from the fact that G. has interested himself in trade-guilds which still flourish in the neighbourhood of Tours, and which in fact have a somewhat similar origin as Masonry and rites of affiliation and so forth corresponding with it.' So you see. Next there is the question of the source of his funds at the time of his first election."

"That sounds interesting."

"A business man of Tours, named Lesouchier, is mentioned, who is said to have contributed fifty thousand francs. Strikes me as a lot of money. Lesouchier was

awarded a decoration some years later, with the support of G. Well, what of that ? It's quite natural. Then there's some story about a priest, very complicated, which I advise you to ignore."

"Why ?"

"Because you can't make head or tail of it. G. is said to have seen this priest I don't know how many times. They dined together. All this at the time of Combes and the religious Orders. Just when G. was voting with Combes. But it's no secret that G. did not approve of all Combes's measures and that, like Briand, he was in favour of treating the Orders less harshly and not expelling them uncereemoniously. It's a long way from that to supposing that this priest served as an intermediary, and that there were underhand intrigues, promises of electoral support, subsidies. . . . For that matter, the priest may simply have prepared him for communion when he was a child. . . .

"He is also accused of being an antimilitarist on the sly during his military service. His colonel reports him as 'a dangerous influence, but too clever to put himself openly in a position which would enable him to be punished.' In other words, his colonel at that time regrets that he was not able to send him to the disciplinary companies. But that probably doesn't prevent the present officer commanding in his constituency from getting him to use his influence on his behalf."

"All this seems to me very poor stuff. Isn't anything more serious, or more definite, mentioned in connection with his political life ? You're not leaving things out, are you ?"

"No. I'm only leaving out the compliments. For there is everything in our files, even compliments. Would you like to hear this, word for word ? 'He enjoys, both in his own political circle and in the different circles with which he is in contact, a reputation for absolute honesty. . . .'"

"Very annoying, that," murmured de Champcenais, despite himself.

"You find it so, do you ? Well, perhaps it is. It goes on :

' He has never figured in any list of subventions which has passed through our hands. Moreover, the way in which he lives, which is very simple, corresponds with his known income. His salary as a deputy and what little money he makes by writing would certainly suffice to meet his expenses. His liaison with Germaine Baader cannot be a very heavy charge upon him ; for this person makes a good salary on the stage and does not live luxuriously."

" Still, I have been told that she has a very expensive apartment on the quays."

" People say all kinds of things."

" And what else about his private life ? "

" A lot of rubbish. It is said that, some years ago, he was always going to a notorious brothel in the neighbourhood of the Bourse. Probably he went there once with some friends to have a drink. Besides, what's that got to do with us ? The only person who could have anything to say about it is Mademoiselle Baader. There's also a yarn here about a painter's studio in Montmartre, and very young models, and opium. But his name is only mentioned incidentally, among the painter's acquaintances ; and especially because this painter, when he got into trouble, asked G. to help him, which G. did. But that doesn't prove anything. . . . Before Germaine Baader, he had as his mistress the chief assistant in a dressmaker's shop, whom he deserted. The lady persecuted him a little afterwards. It's all quite commonplace."

" He didn't desert her with a baby ? "

" What are you trying to get at ? She may have deceived him, or she may have made his life a burden. She tried to blackmail him because he was fair game. We know what they're like, don't we ? "

" Does it give the name of this woman ? "

The clerk looked at Champcenais.

" What do you want it for ? "

Champcenais felt himself looking sheepish.

" Oh, nothing, of course. I just asked out of mere curiosity. . . . So that's all, is it ? "

" Yes, it is."

"You're not slurring the most interesting parts over?"

"I swear I'm not."

"You give one the impression that you are defending him. Indeed you do. Everything that is unfavourable to him you set about explaining away."

"Not at all. I'm simply putting you on your guard. Because I have had a lot more to do with this kind of gossip than you have."

"Well, let me tell you at once that there's nothing in this file of yours that's worth anything. You might have told me so sooner."

"I beg your pardon. This file testifies that the gentleman in question is an honest man."

"More or less."

"I should say that it is an exceptionally interesting file – and very comforting, too."

The oil-dealer asked himself whether the other was laughing at him. He pursed his lips.

"You amuse me with your 'comforting.'"

"This is the first time that I have had occasion to open it. I may tell you that I have always had, personally, a very high opinion of the gentleman in question. All politics apart. But I am happy to find that opinion confirmed. I am, really."

"Is he such a fool," Champcenais wondered, "as to imagine that I came here looking for a good character for Gurau? Or is he trying to teach me a lesson?"

The thousand-franc note was in an envelope, in the same pocket as his note-case. Before he took it out – without any enthusiasm – the oil-dealer wanted to make quite sure that he had not been fooled. He said, in a stern tone of voice:

"I can trust you, can I? There is nothing else in that file of any importance whatever? Favourable to the gentleman or not? In short, anything likely to interest me? You can assure me of that?"

"Word of honour."

"Very well. . . . Can't be helped."

And he handed over the envelope.

A quarter of an hour after Champcenais had left, Desboulmiers got up and asked :

“What about making a move ?”

But for the last few minutes Sammécaud had been indulging in a day-dream of a rather unusual kind. It had acquired consistency in proportion as the conversation lost interest. Out of a kind of feeling that it was the right thing to do while their associate was absent, they had dropped the question of Gurau almost at once, and started exchanging remarks about modern furniture, of which they had some provocative examples before their eyes.

Sammécaud, whom the problems of decorative art did not interest in the least, agreed with what Desboulmiers said, without paying much attention to it. He found himself thinking about Mme de Champcenais. Perhaps it was because of a very slight perfume of eau-de-Cologne which was wafted through the apartment or because of a distant sound of running water.

“She is making her toilet.” Never before had he thought about Mme de Champcenais making her toilet. Never before, for that matter, so far as he could remember, had he been in that apartment so early in the morning. He had known the family for a dozen years. He was on familiar terms with the husband. He had seen the freshness of early youth in the wife bloom and merge into a delightful beginning of middle age. He had desired her more than once, but he had not pressed his suit. A few compliments, a little more emphatic than usual on certain evenings, after a capital dinner ; a few loving looks ; but nothing which exceeded that permitted licence for which the atmosphere of a party is responsible and which dissolves along with it.

“She is in her bathroom or in her bedroom. She is moving about between one and the other. How intimate, how indecent, how soothing, that sound of running water is ! Desboulmiers doesn’t even hear it. I am listening to it just as one peeps round a curtain. A friend’s wife. One has certain rights, of which I have not made the most. A store

of liberties, of familiarities, which I have kept more or less intact. No stranger to me, either in mind or in body. Many a time when I have seen her arms, her shoulders, her bosom. When we have laughed, or smiled, at the same things. All those looks exchanged and laid aside, but not dead.

"I know the scent of her; not merely the perfumes she likes, I don't mean that, but her very own scent too. I have seen her on days when she was looking her worst. I have found her, on occasion, plain, or even boring. I am inoculated against the ups and downs of her charm — tiredness, bad light, bad temper, badly chosen dress; even, in advance, against what the years do to her. I have a good enough idea of the way in which she will grow old not to need to pay much attention to it. . . . My wife, who treats her as a good friend, does not like her. . . ."

But Desboulmiers was still standing up.

"Can't you drag yourself out of that arm-chair? Won't the 'new art' let you go?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. But I was thinking that, if it weren't so early, there is a bit of information I want to get from Madame de Champcenais. . . . I don't know whether——"

"Oh, you needn't stand on ceremony here. The housemaid will tell you whether you can see her. Shall I wait for you?"

"No, don't. I'll try to see her. It will save my coming back just for that."

The housemaid came into the drawing-room to Sammécaud. Desboulmiers had given the message to her while she was helping him on with his coat.

"You wish to see Madame la Comtesse, monsieur?"

"Only if I won't be disturbing her. I don't want her to put herself out on my account. Please tell her that, whatever you do."

"I'll ask Madame la Comtesse."

More than ten minutes passed. Sammécaud could very well do with them; not so much to summon up his courage

as to make up his mind what shade of meaning, what turn towards the future, he was going to give the little event that lay ahead of him.

For it really was a kind of event ; and it was little only for the time being. Sammécaud felt sentimental ; his heart was beating fast ; and he took a keen pleasure in his own emotion. The oil business receded into a useful but not very ornamental sphere of existence, like those parts of great cities to which one relegates goods stations and gasworks.

“ Happily, there are women in life ! ”

Happily, too, there were men like himself, capable of forgetting enormous interests, of shrugging their shoulders contemptuously where millions were concerned, because a romantic dream had tickled their nostrils.

“ I am of middle-class descent and middle-class upbringing. But there’s nothing middle-class about this. There is a strain in me of fantastic chivalry. I don’t show up very well in that glass ; but, in a different costume, I have the head of a passionate, adventurous man of the Renaissance. Less Spanish than Maurice Barrès. More devoted, more sensual. More truly French. I might have led quite a different kind of life.

“ But I defend my heritage. A kind of loyalty towards my ancestors. A post which I have been given, together with an order. In the Army a very smart officer may, during a strike, have to mount guard over a grocery-store. Nothing derogatory about that. On the contrary, the amusement of doing a thing very well when one has no real contact with it. That’s the point – no contact. Gloves. I do my business with gloves on. That’s how you can recognise real aristocracy. Champcenais, who is more or less an aristocrat by birth, has a much more plebeian way of handling the ordinary affairs of life. Even his offensive against Gurau lacks elegance. That business of his at the Prefecture, for example – there’s something rather shabby about that. I ought to have opposed that. I shall have to try to take these negotiations with Gurau in hand myself ; otherwise they’ll lead us into all kinds of dirtiness. I don’t dislike

what I have seen of Gurau. A fine, keen face. He's very French, too. Why should we always try to get at people on what is supposed to be their worst side? Deputy from Touraine. There must be people we both know.

"Is she going to see me? Of course. Otherwise she wouldn't keep me waiting. What am I going to say to her? I'll see. Nothing very definite. Just an atmosphere. A sentimental state in which I find myself and which will betray itself as circumstances suggest. It depends most of all on how she receives me."

The housemaid reappeared.

"If you will come this way, monsieur."

She conducted him to the "modernistic" boudoir, mouse-grey and pale rose. Just as he entered it, the other door opened. Marie de Champcenais, in a gown almost as free and easy as a wrap, held out her hand to Sammécaud. She had carefully completed her toilet, but at the same time had left an air of hurry about it. Scent, freshness, an atmosphere of moistness accompanied her and invested the meeting at once with a charming physical intimacy.

"I must apologise for receiving you like this."

"And I for having had the audacity to ask you to receive me."

The tone of voice in which he said this was odd. She looked at him.

"Oh, it wasn't so very audacious."

"If you had known what was going on in my mind when I suddenly made it up to ask you to see me, I don't say that you would have found it audacious, because I don't know; but you would have hesitated about understanding it."

"How solemn you are! . . . Understanding what?"

"What was going on inside me."

"Is it so difficult to understand?"

"Difficult to make it sound plausible. It's one of those little internal dramas which the person concerned can comprehend very well, but which look like a bad joke from the outside."

"You're certainly succeeding in intriguing me."

"I'm not trying to. Quite the contrary. Well, it struck me all at once that I could not go away this morning without having seen you. Nothing else mattered."

"Well, you're seeing me."

"Yes."

"Oh! . . . What a 'yes'!"

She pretended to believe that he was joking; but she could not go on pretending, so concerned did he look.

He went on:

"I surprise you. Oh, I quite expect you to find me unbelievable, ridiculous. But imagine for a moment that I am on the point of starting for a tour around the world, or going to war. Or that I am going to a hospital to-morrow for one of those operations when the odds are even whether one ever comes out again. . . . There's no question of anything like that; but just suppose. . . . Well, then you would have less difficulty in understanding me. You would appreciate that I might have been able to keep silent so far. . . . More than that – that I might not have realised my own feelings until now, but that the lightning-flash of such an event suddenly drives me to reveal all that you are to me. . . . Do you understand?"

She did not dare to smile any longer. She did not answer.

"This sudden enlightenment – can it be that it needs some outside event, some shock of destiny, to make it happen? . . . Just as a bodily illness declares itself, without visible cause, in somebody who seems to us in perfect health? Oh, I can put myself in your place. It is the old friend who I still am in your eyes that prevents you from understanding, as otherwise you might, the man who is now before you. No matter. You will come to understand him, even if only a little. You will think things over. You will ask yourself questions. For his part, he feels an extraordinary sense of relief even in having told you so little, and so badly, about what has happened to him."

He devoured her with his eyes, for the first time in his

life. He found her beautiful, sweet, desirable. He perceived depths of tenderness in her, prospects which were intoxicating in themselves, even if they led only to the shifts and shadows of a secret intimacy.

"My dear, dear friend!" he murmured. "My dear Marie! Just a quarter of an hour like this, from time to time. That's all I ask."

She looked at him. Her lips were trembling a little. It was years since anybody had spoken to her like this. And the man who was speaking to her like this was Sammécaud, every feature of whose face she knew, every inflexion of his voice, his beginning of baldness, his slight greying at the temples, his favourite ideas, his fads about food. Whose limitations she thought she knew; but no, she did not know them. Whom she had been sure would never be dangerous to her peace of mind.

But here he was, more dangerous, perhaps, than any stranger. Because a stranger is absolutely strange. It is precisely the excess of strangeness about him that puts you on your guard. Even if he seems to conquer you all at once, he comes up for a long time against a whole series of invisible entrenchments in which you keep on taking refuge. But when Sammécaud, this familiar figure, presented himself with a certain amount of stranger under his arm, your surprise would not help you to prevent him from passing, he and his baggage. You would be like a familiar path to him, along which one made rapid strides.

He got up. He kissed the hand which Marie de Champcenais surrendered to him. They had the feeling that they were growing young again together. The mouse-grey and pale rose boudoir, the tea-gown, the scent of intimacy, the light of the rue Mozart made up a silken network in which the future, about which neither of them had been thinking, but which had flown in like a bird through the window, had oddly become caught. Marie knew very well that, even now, she had only to raise her hand to release it. But in her, together with any desire to find a counter-thrust, any effort of will to make a choice was also in suspense.



JERPHANION MEETS JALLEZ  
GURAU IS ALL ALONE



“HE told me: ‘Come Tuesday – some time during the morning.’ He didn’t fix any definite time. But at a time like this I ought to have a good chance of catching him.”

Jerphanion introduced himself to the porter at the outer gate again, crossed a little courtyard, and cast an eye over the front of the building, asking himself once more whether it really was ugly. He was pretty sure that it was; but when the last few years of your life have been spent in the setting of a provincial grammar-school and a barracks, it is thankless of you to be too hard on the front of the Training College.

He reached the main hall, with its door-keeper’s lodge.

“Yes, Monsieur Dupuy is here. But not in his office. I saw him going along there, to the right, with a gentleman. No, you can’t go after him. They must have gone upstairs. Just you wait here. He’s bound to come back, when he shows the gentleman out.”

At this moment a young man, who was looking out at the inner courtyard through the window, turned around and came up. He was not so tall as Jerphanion. He had a lean, rather pale face. Jerphanion did not think of noticing the colour of his eyes; but they impressed him because of a kind of ironicalness, quite courteous though he looked, which flashed through them.

"Good morning," he said. "You want to see Dupuy?"

"Yes."

"I think he'll be back. He looked as though he were showing somebody from outside around the place. You've met him?"

"Certainly I have. As a matter of fact, I introduced myself to him last week."

"You're a new-comer, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I remember your face now. I saw you several times during the examination. In 1907, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's right."

"In particular, we took the history examination together. My name is Jallez - Pierre Jallez."

"Jallez? You passed right up at the top of the list, didn't you? My name's Jerphanion - Jean Jerphanion. I just scraped in - twenty-sixth down the list."

"But . . . you hadn't as much beard as that when you took the examination, had you?"

"No. It was much shorter. I let it grow while I was doing my military service."

"I came here this morning to have a look at the study-rooms. Have you seen them yet?"

"No."

"They're not so bad, most of them. While you're waiting for Dupuy, wouldn't you like to have a look at them yourself?"

"I would, very much."

They followed the corridor to the right and then turned to the left.

"Anyway, the important thing is not so much the study itself as the people you have in it with you. That really is important."

"How many of us are there going to be to each study?"

"Since they have increased the number of admissions, there's rather a tendency to crowd us. I believe there are going to be five of us, at least. . . . Here's one that's a fair size. . . . Oh, but I'm not sure whether they are not all

the same size, all the ones on this floor. . . . But let me show you another. What about this? It has a better view — more open.”

Each first-year “study” was a room of about ten feet six wide by fifteen long, with a high ceiling. The furniture consisted of four or five square tables, as many chairs, and two rows of little cupboards, fixed along two walls at right angles. A big, round stove occupied one of the corners. The whole place looked like a derelict civil-service office. But still, whenever you opened one of these doors, there emerged a kind of psychic wave whose impact was not unpleasant. In the country, when you go into a fruit-shop, even though there is nothing in it, the smell of it at once conveys to you a feeling of pleasure and dreams of plenty. Here what you breathed was, beyond any doubt, the aroma of the thoughts of youth, which is an incomparable tonic. The idea of living between these walls, despite their official dreariness, did not manage to frighten you.

“Can one choose his own study?” asked Jerphanion.

“I don’t think there are any very strict rules about it. They expect us to make friendly arrangements among ourselves. Perhaps the seniors are given the first choice. I don’t know, and I don’t care. The essential thing is to get together with possible people.”

“Have you come to any understanding with any other comrades of yours?”

“In principle, the other two fellows from Condorcet will come in with me. One of them is quite a nice chap. He won’t be a boarder, as a matter of fact; but he will work in the study. The other fellow we shall scarcely ever see. Not only because he won’t be a boarder either, but also because he’s a very aristocratic young gentleman, a scion of the nobility. Except for his time at lectures or in the library, he’ll be hurrying home to his own private study. He’ll just shake hands with us once a term.”

“You’re going to be a boarder, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am . . . although my family live in Paris. At

least I shall be for this year. I want to see what college life is like. For various reasons. In the first place, because you have more freedom."

"One really has a lot of freedom?"

"Yes, I think so. So far as I can tell from everything I've heard. You'll be a boarder too, won't you? Don't your people live in the provinces?"

"I've got an uncle here, with whom I'm staying at the moment. But that arrangement isn't going to last. Yes, I shall be a boarder."

"What school do you come from?"

"Lyons."

"You're the only one?"

"Yes. There is another fellow - but——"

"But you can get on without him?"

"Exactly."

The two young men fell silent. Each of them felt quite a decided liking for the other. But they were not going to let themselves yield to it too fast, and, above all, they were not going to be so ill-bred as to show any signs of it too soon. Each of them possessed, in different degrees, a temperament prone to enthusiasms; but also an extreme aversion from any mere pretence of enthusiasm, anything which was merely superficial or counterfeit. They would rather be suspected of being unemotional.

They were aware, moreover, that a little reserve, a little exercise of the critical spirit, at the beginning does not prevent a real friendship from coming to birth, but rather safeguards it against later disappointment and helps us to distinguish it from mere comradeship. So each of them deliberately endeavoured to see the more unpleasant, and even the ridiculous, side of the other.

"His provincial accent jars on me a little," thought Jallez. "Of course, he may get rid of it. Besides, he's rather heavy in the going. Probably he doesn't know much about things. What could we find to talk about?"

"He looks a bit too cynical for my liking," thought Jerphanion. "His tone of voice worries me sometimes."

Though he is careful not to show it, I'm sure he has a very good opinion of himself. I don't know whether I should like to trust him."

Finally Jallez said :

"I suppose you wouldn't like to share our study, if it could be arranged ?"

Jerphanion, who was looking forward to this offer and was eager to accept it, responded with the best show of indifference he could muster :

"If you think I should not be in the way ; and if your comrades are of the same opinion. . . ."

"They won't raise any objection. Besides, as we are going to be the two boarders, it's we two who shall have to stand together the most. So we are the most interested parties. I'll try to get this study. That suit you ? . . . And now what about going down again ? Dupuy may be back by now. . . . Are you going to be long with him ?"

"No."

"Because I could wait for you if you're not. And then we might have a walk together ?"

"Good. It's a question of some lessons he was going to get me to give."

"Tutoring, eh ?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I came up to Paris on October 6th, instead of the 30th as I originally intended, with the idea that I was going to take on a fine tutoring job. My professor at Lyons had recommended me to Dupuy. Dupuy has been very kind. But the family to whom I was going have just changed their minds, or at least they're hesitating. Dupuy was the more annoyed about it because he knew that I had come up from Lyons on purpose. Anyway, he told me to come back to-day, the 13th. Said he would try to fix it up after all or get something else for me. . . . I'm not counting on it very much."

"He will have done his best. For all his fondness for pulling your leg, he's an obliging, keen fellow. . . . Hallo, there he is, shaking hands with that man over there. Get hold of him."



"Good morning, Jerphanion."

"So you remember my name, monsieur?"

"Don't you run away with the idea that all we professors are old dotards! Besides, it would be unpardonable to forget such a fine name. For a very fine name it is. You come from somewhere around Lyons?"

"From Le Velay."

"From Le Velay, eh? Le Puy-en-Velay — there's a splendid town. Though my name is Dupuy, unfortunately I don't come from that particular Le Puy. And you think your family has been there for a long time? It's very curious. I must talk about it to Matruchot, who isn't satisfied with teaching botany, but is also one of the shining lights of onomastics. He's quite capable of proving that your ancestors were Greeks from Asia Minor who were drawn to Le Velay by capillary attraction. Jerphanion. One can very well imagine a pope, or an archimandrite, who was called Jerphanion and worked miracles. You haven't verified whether there was a historical personage of that name of yours?"

"I haven't been able to find anybody in ordinary encyclopædias."

"Ἱεροφανιον . . . isn't there such a word as that in Greek?"

"Well, there's *φανιον*, and I suppose one could admit a composite word, *Ἱεροφανιον*, just as there is *Ἱεροφάντης*, a hierophant."

"And what is the meaning of *φανιον*?"

"A little torch — a torch."

"So *Ἱεροφανιον*: sacred torch. That's great. And it's almost certainly right. As a piece of etymology, it is as little far-fetched as possible. *Ἱερ* gives *Jer*, quite naturally. Look at *Jerome*: *ἱερόνομος*. The long 'o' has persisted in *Jerome* just because it was an omega and because it carried the accent. . . . Come in. . . . I'm receiving you all in a flurry. I have an appointment with Monsieur Lavisé at this very moment."

"I don't want to——"

“ Come in ! ”

They had been going upstairs as they talked. Jerphanion felt somewhat embarrassed as he came under the influence of this lean, active man's spell. Every impression that he received from him, every idea about him that he formed, was succeeded by another, which did not contradict the first, but corrected it, prevented it from being too straightforward, stamped it with the seal of doubt, or, rather, of relativity.

He was your immediate superior, the real head of the establishment, with the title of Secretary-General which he had secured for himself at the time of the reform of the college, since his former title of Superintendent-General seemed to him too portentous, smacking too much of the usher. And he talked to you like a comrade making fun of the staff and quite ready to give you a hand if it came to ragging them.

He had a hollow, bony face, the mask of a Spanish saint ravaged by fasting and nocturnal prayer. But he had also sparkling eyes, which looked as though they were always ripe for some fresh devilment, and an expression of perpetual amusement, ranging from an almost imperceptible smile, indicated less by his lips than by the blinking of his eyelids, to an uncontrolled laugh which distended his mouth and set the opposite wall vibrating.

He had a very clear, musical diction, very varied in its modulation, with niceties and noisinesses, isolating and stressing syllables – a way of speaking all the time as though he were addressing an audience which he had to reach even in the furthest corner of a lecture-room and which he had to keep awake ; but still there was no oratorical solemnity about it. All this was carried by a ringing voice, a trifle nasal, sometimes harsh, a mixture of oboe and trumpet, with nothing Parisian about it, although it was difficult to associate the inflexions to which it lent itself with any provincial accent, and although it had in fact all the vivacity in its rise and fall of a voice of Paris.

They went into his office, which was very large and was

saved from being dreary by its brightness. Instead of going and sitting down at his desk, in his official arm-chair, Dupuy took the first chair that came to hand, and invited Jerphanion to take the one beside it.

"Well, here we are. This business of yours is all settled."

"Oh! — I'm very much——"

"That's all right, that's all right. But, all the same, I must tell you something about the situation, because it's rather funny, and you had better know where you are. I don't know whether I mentioned the name of the people to you, did I? The Saint-Papouls. The *de* Saint-Papouls. Marquis or count. The most 'thala' family you could possibly find. You know the meaning of 'thala' in our college slang? But our 'thalas' here content themselves with being practising Catholics, and they may, from the political and social point of view, have very advanced ideas. Most of them, you know, are pretty high-brow in their tendencies. But for outside purposes the meaning of 'thala' is wider, and when you say 'thala,' you mean more or less reactionary.

"That's the case with our Saint-Papouls, or at least it was, as far as I can make out, not very long ago. Anyway, Monsieur de Saint-Papoul intends, so I'm told, to be a candidate at the 1910 election of deputies in his own part of the country, which votes Left. The pledges of his devotion to the Republic and to laicism which he has given so far are not very much. It is true that his elder son is attached to the Ministry of Commerce. But that won't impress people particularly. His younger son is a pupil at the Bossuet school, and the fathers fetch him from there to attend lectures at Louis-le-Grand. His daughter goes to a convent school.

"The daughter might pass muster. But a friend must have whispered in his ear that, for a candidate of the Left, a son at the Bossuet school simply will not do. So it's been a question, since the beginning of this year, of replacing the Bossuet school by private tutoring. But where they showed a stroke of genius was in addressing themselves,

for this tutoring, to the Training College. You see? A pack of pagans like us! . . . What a reply to interruptions at public meetings at Sigoulès or Montignac!

"There was a fine tug-of-war with the mother. I suppose she regards the Training College student as sarcastic, satanic, and subversive. And then she's read *The Disciple* and found out that the dream of every young lay tutor, brought up on materialistic philosophy, is to seduce the daughter of the house. So a week ago, when you arrived, the plan was all in the soup. I've fished it out again. A comrade of yours, Gillot, a regular Doctor of Science, will take charge of his science lessons. You'll have to look after the literature lessons. That's the hardest job. You're more likely to trample on the flower-beds. You'll want to watch your step."

"Do you think I can manage all right?"

"Of course you can. If there's any hitch, come and tell me about it. They live in the rue Vaneau. You've got the address, haven't you? Present yourself on Friday, at five o'clock. And now I'll have to turn you out. Here's to next time, Jerphanion."

"Well?"

"Well, it's all fixed."

"That's good. Let's go, shall we?"

Jerphanion reported the conversation which he had just had with Dupuy. He added:

"What surprises me, considering the people concerned, is that Dupuy should have thought of me. To begin with, he doesn't know anything about me."

"He does know something about you. . . . He saw you at the time of the examination. He's got an extraordinary memory for people. And he's been tipped off about you. You mean he might have thought of some of our 'thala' comrades sooner than you? Not at all. Think it out for yourself. He wanted to give de Saint-Papoul all the benefit of his audacity. Besides, the 'thalas' are liable to make all kinds of boners which you wouldn't think of making."

Don't you see ? Apart from wanting to do you a service, he's taken all the circumstances into account. Half past ten. Have you got a little time to spare ? ”

“ So long as I get back to my uncle's in time for lunch.”

“ Whereabouts does he live ? ”

“ Quite close to the Lyons station.”

“ Oh, then we have lots of time to look around. Do you know Paris well ? ”

“ Indeed I don't. I've only been here before for the oral examination. And I was terribly tired. I just took a walk in the centre of the city, in the evening. And on Sunday, before I went home, I rushed around to some of the sights. All that doesn't really count.”

“ I'm very glad to hear you say so.”

“ Why's that ? ”

“ Because I have a kind of passion for Paris ; and the more I get to know her, the harder I find it to answer certain questions which I ask myself. I'd like to approach them for the first time – to get the shock of them. Even those shutters up there, for example, or the arrangement of the windows in the fronts of those houses – I'd like to have never seen them, to look at them with quite fresh eyes. That's something like your point of view, isn't it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ But perhaps you're not particularly interested in that way of looking at things ? ”

“ On the contrary, I am, very much.”

“ Really ? So much the better. . . . Then what is your first impression of Paris ? ”

“ This isn't quite my first impression.”

“ Strictly speaking, I suppose it isn't.”

“ And my first impression is something that perhaps I ought to try to forget. It was spoilt so much by the foul stink of the examination.”

“ I see. . . . You lived in Lyons, didn't you ? I don't know Lyons myself. Did you feel any particular difference when you arrived here ? ”

"Yes, I felt that for the first time in my life I had come into contact with a great city."

"But isn't Lyons a great city?"

"Not in the sense I mean. There ought to be a hyphenated word: 'great-city.' It's something quite new to me. That's what I kept on saying to myself, a week ago, as I was coming through the suburbs in the train: 'A different world altogether. A different period altogether.'"

"Is that so? That interests me tremendously. And how did you feel about it, inside you? Excited?"

"Yes, at first; but then, immediately afterwards, depressed."

"Oh? . . . And where are you now?"

"Still depressed; but it's beginning to wear off."

They went down the rue Claude-Bernard, on the left-hand pavement. The sky was cloudy, but the air was very soft for a mid-October morning. Jallez surveyed that very ordinary street, asking himself whether anybody other than himself could find in it the influences, the signs, the reminders, the allusions of Paris as a whole, of which it struck him as being full. He asked himself this question with real interest, rather than self-confidently. He was not one of those men who expect to find in other people, as their due, the equivalent of their own sensibility. He was quite ready to admit that certain things which meant a great deal to him, for reasons which he would find it difficult to explain, might not mean anything at all to other people with plenty of brains.

Apart from this, he was on his guard against mere politeness, against the illusory idea of sharing the same impressions which it encourages, especially when a growing friendship comes into play in it. The fear of any such misunderstanding, the almost physical repugnance which it provoked in him, were much stronger in him than his desire to take other people into his confidence. So much so that, as a general rule, he talked least about the things that interested him most. Nevertheless, he did not press this precaution to the point of sticking to trifling matters.

There are, happily, questions upon which the mind fastens eagerly, but which have no association with anything intimate, anything secret, in ourselves. We can discuss them, and we can even bring an intellectual keenness to bear upon them, without our souls giving anything away. It was to questions of this kind that Jallez usually confined his conversation. He had already infringed his rule a little in favour of Jerphanion.

"What you need to avoid," he went on, "when you have plenty of time, as you have, is simply looking out for curiosities, visiting Paris as though you were a tourist – the monuments, the museums, the landmarks one by one, in the traditional order. But that's not such a very difficult thing to guard against when you have the feeling that you are going to settle down and become an inhabitant. Mere laziness helps you to avoid it. The real danger is rather that of getting used to a conventional Paris, made up of five or six central districts, always the same, where you move to and fro automatically, plus the little corner where your business lies. Once a new-comer to Paris has slipped into that rut, even for three weeks, he is lost. You may see him again ten years later. He will still be somebody who does not know what you are talking about when you mention the Buttes-Chaumont or the Ile des Cygnes."

"Then what do you recommend?"

"What we are doing at this moment. Walk straight in front of you, in any direction that presents itself. Let yourself be led by the places themselves, by their influence, their intonation. You find yourself in a street. You feel like walking along it. It says something to you. Or it is a boulevard which you can't help following; perhaps because of its animation, or the direction in which it seems to go, or something about it as a whole that carries you along; or perhaps for some quite different reason."

"But at this moment, for example, you're not letting yourself be led at random, are you? You know very well where you are taking us?"

"Of course. The two things go well together. There's

no reason why you shouldn't have an objective, so long as you keep it in its place and feel that you can take liberties with it if you want to. You end by blending the two things – even in the course of a walk that you have to take whether you like it or not. Rather like a musician who improvises upon request. Another point is that you mustn't let the familiarity that you acquire with places make a slave of you. Even through the neighbourhoods that I know best, my walks still mean surprises to me. It's improvisation, as I was just saying. I have no regular itineraries. Or, rather, they are itineraries that are always fresh, always capable of being changed. You see all these people ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Probably there's not one of them who is not at this very moment following an itinerary personal to himself ; or one of his itineraries, for everybody has several. Just think of that : the continuousness of the lines they trace. For that matter, it's very impressive ; in fact, it's very fine. But it's not a bad thing that from time to time there should come along a man not bound by any personal itinerary. Like the good swimmer in Baudelaire, ‘ who swoons upon the waves.’ ”

“ Do you spend a lot of time, yourself, in walks of this kind ? ”

“ Yes, a good deal, one way and another. Not so much as I should like. One must make the best of it. In the Paris that's coming, who knows whether it will still be possible ? ”

“ You seem to attach a certain amount of importance to it, eh ? ”

Jallez smiled before he replied :

“ Yes, I do.”

“ Do you just treat it as a pastime . . . or is it—— ? ”

“ Or is it what ? ”

“ I don't know – a deeper interest ? ”

“ Yes, if you like.”

“ But of what kind ? ”

“ Do you really need things explained to you as much as all that ? ”

"No, but I should like to know, that's all."

"You'll find out for yourself—if you practise. You remember Pascal's advice, about the efficacy of practice?"

"'Deaden yourself!'"

"It's not so much a question of deadening yourself; but of waiting patiently until the mind perceives what happens to it—without wanting to know beforehand at all costs."

Then Jallez suddenly changed his tone. He said, in a light-hearted, almost jocular kind of way, as though he wanted to deprive his words of any particular value :

"You know, I'm very glad we met this morning. I have an idea that it will turn out to be a lucky thing for us. I don't know whether we shall always be of the same opinion. But that isn't what counts most. At our age, and in our sphere of life, we are overburdened with comrades who have opinions—and nothing but opinions. What is difficult to find is somebody who is capable of taking an interest in things about which he hasn't any opinion yet. That's what I call a serious-minded man. The others are light-minded pedants."

"That's true. All brilliant brains, of course. At Lyons we used to toss them in blankets."

"Besides, I have the feeling not only that life is very short——"

"What, already?"

"Yes, already. Haven't you?"

"Well, I suppose I have."

"But also that the decisive part of it lasts a very brief time. I shouldn't like to make too much of some harrowing examples I know. We are entitled to hope that we shall escape such a shattering disappointment as that. But, even in lives that are quite a success, one finds that certain questions are settled early. For example, that of the people you meet, your friendships. I believe that, starting from an age quite close to our own—I mean an age which we have nearly reached—one goes on in a terrible loneliness——"

"Except, perhaps, for the friendships that one has already made——"

"Yes, exactly. . . . In the case of love, perhaps the same thing necessarily applies too. . . . What do you think about that ?"

"I'm not sure. . . . There are certainly people who have love-affairs, every one of which seems to be quite serious, quite overwhelming, several times in their lives, and at fairly long intervals. There are also those who say that you really love only once. . . ."

"In any case, the question may arise. Whereas, so far as friendships go, I'm very much afraid that it may not arise at all. I explain that to myself, in my own private language — the one I keep for my own use — by what I call the testimony."

"And that means——?"

"Oh, it doesn't mean very much except to myself. It's associated with an idea I have about friendship, and also with an idea I have about the mind — the idea that, at a certain moment in life, the mind is called upon to testify to certain things. . . . You know, I've got a positive horror of pretentious showing off ; and here you are making me do it. Still, it's only my clumsiness that makes it sound pretentious ; the idea behind it is quite simple. . . . You know Rembrandt's *The Pilgrims at Emmaus*, at least from reproductions ?"

"Yes. I just had a look at the picture, the Sunday when I galloped through the Louvre ; but it's from reproductions that I know it best."

"Since the other day, when you arrived, you haven't been back to the Louvre ?"

"No."

"And you haven't walked about Paris either, so far as I can make out ?"

"Scarcely at all."

Jallez seemed surprised and rather shocked. Jerphanion was consumed with shame.

"Not only have I enormous gaps in my education, which

he can sense only too well. But now he's saying to himself that I have spent my first week in Paris doing nothing at all, without any more curiosity than a soldier on leave."

Jerphanion asked himself whether he should make the best of the excuses he had to offer. He hesitated, because they were decidedly commonplace. But it was better to risk looking slightly ridiculous than to be exposed to a contempt which went down to essentials. Besides, where Jallez was concerned, he preferred to tell the truth.

"My week simply trickled away without my noticing it, and in the most absurd kind of way. First I had to do some shopping, which seemed to go on for ever, under the wing of my aunt. And then my uncle, who is not well off and is mad about pottering around, wanted me to help him fix the electricity in his apartment. I did it nearly all myself."

He added, at the cost of a new spurt of moral courage :

"As a matter of fact, I was very glad to do it. It's a serious thing about me. I often realise that I have an insatiable appetite for manual labour ; and when I once give way to it, I can't stop. Heredity, no doubt. It carries me along hour after hour, like a seizure, like a vice ; and then I heap reproaches on my own head. I know very well that it is the line of least resistance."

"Yes, that's it, isn't it? Even with our inexperience and all the difficulties of detail, there's a kind of intoxicating easiness about manual work. That's what the animal that we are likes best. The only fatigue of which he's really afraid is that of the brain. The keenness with which some of our comrades throw themselves into work of pure erudition comes from the same thing ; it's next door to manual work. I'm rather given to it myself, too, sometimes. . . .

"We must go and see *The Pilgrims at Emmaus* together. Why was I talking about the picture ? To throw some light on this idea of testimony of mine. The pilgrims in the inn are witnesses of an event, a presence, as yet hidden from the rest of the world. They will have to testify to it together. Even if they had not known one another before,

they would become great friends. According to my idea, it's always rather in that way that you make friends with anybody. You are present together at a moment in the life of the world, perhaps in the presence of a fleeting secret of the world – an apparition which nobody has ever seen before and perhaps nobody will ever see again.

“It may even be something very little. Take two men going for a walk, for example, like us. Suddenly, thanks to a break in the clouds, a ray of light comes and strikes the top of a wall; and the top of the wall becomes, for the moment, something in some way quite extraordinary. One of the two men touches the other on the shoulder. The other raises his head and sees it too, understands it too. Then the thing up there vanishes. But they will know *in æternum* that it once existed.”

“You think that friendship depends on something like that?”

“Depends on it – perhaps not. Springs from it. I've just taken a case where the thing to be attested to is the humblest kind of thing. *The Pilgrims* is the supreme example. And that's why, too, you have so little time to make even a small number of friends – friends whom you may lose, but whom you will never replace.”

“I don't quite see the connection. . . .”

“It's quite clear. Even supposing that in the whole of our lives we have a chance like that at Emmaus – I mean the chance of stumbling upon an extraordinary presence, which deserves to be attested to *in æternum* – at what age shall we have it, old man? Think it over. If we don't have it now?”

“That suggests that it's very exciting to be the age we are now and to have the next few years before us. . . .”

“It is, indeed.”

“But you were saying something about love. . . . Don't you agree that there's something similar in the case of love?”

“You mean love that is love and nothing else – when friendship doesn't come in as well? Love is so much more bound up in itself, born of itself. So much more shut up,

At least, that's how it strikes me. Its drama is played out inside it. Lovers turn towards one another. Friends turn to something which is neither of them."

"Still, lovers do look at the moonlight or the stars?"

"Yes. . . ."

"I say 'moonlight' and 'stars' in the symbolical sense. The world outside them – something that is not themselves. That is even one of those presences you were talking about."

"Perhaps. All distinctions become false if you push them too far. But you'll see for yourself, later on. I think there's some truth, after all, in what I've been trying to say to you."

A strong smell of tanning spread around them. Jerphanion sniffed it in surprise. A girl crossed the street, passed close beside them, and glanced at them casually.

"She's not so bad," said Jallez. "Is there any particular type of girl in Lyons?"

"More or less of a type. The women there aren't bad-looking, most of them."

"And what about life as a whole? Not too dull?"

"It's hard for a fellow at school to say."

"Anyway, it's a town where there's something to do. They say the museum is very fine; and the people are fond of music. Are you fond of music yourself?"

Before he replied, Jerphanion and his self-esteem had another little private argument.

"Yes, I think I'm entitled to say that I'm fond of it. But, as a matter of fact, I don't know much about it. It's really only in literature that I've been able to educate myself a bit. You can see why that is. Even so, I don't know much about modern literature. So far as painting and music go, I haven't had the same opportunities as some people."

He almost blushed as he added:

"I'm hoping to catch up here."

"Of course you will. . . . What did you talk about with your comrades mostly?"

"With most of them, there wasn't anything one could

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talk about. . . . With two or three of them, about literature, philosophy, politics."

"Are you interested in politics?"

"Not so much in politicians' politics. . . . But in political ideas, or social ideas, in events in themselves - of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?"

"You're quite right, of course."

"You don't despise all that?"

"I should be a fool if I did. . . . No, quite the opposite. Sometimes it makes me think a lot - it almost obsesses me. Just now, for example."

"What, really? You too?"

"My year of military service may have had something to do with it."

"It had, I dare say. You ask yourself such questions. . . ."

He went on, in a lower tone of voice:

"And there are some questions that you don't ask yourself any more."

"Because you've made up your mind about them? . . . Yes."

They exchanged a mysterious little smile, as though their unexpressed thoughts had already got to the point which their conversation would only reach later.

"I've always been rather pessimistic," said Jallez, "about the world as we find it, the present state of the world. But I came back from barracks with a feeling of fatalism that was - how shall I put it? - that had something religious about it. That's a thing we'll have to talk about. What do you think about all this Balkan business?"

"Last week I thought it was all up."

"For us too?"

"Certainly."

"I don't feel that things have got much better since then. The telegrams this morning don't amount to much. . . . In any case, the foolishness of people is something frightful. Oh, that reminds me - I must show you something I read."

"What was it?"

"Well - no, you'll have to see it for yourself. I copied

it down. I haven't got it on me at the moment, unfortunately. I copied it down just to give myself a sour satisfaction. And to show it to people, on occasion. As a touchstone. Another matter of 'testimony.' The foolishness of it is perhaps something as supernatural as the apparition at Emmaus."

They had left the avenue des Gobelins, and, along little streets, they came out at the top of the boulevard de l'Hôpital. Jallez stopped for a moment. He asked :

"You haven't ever been here before ?"

"No, I haven't."

"How does it strike you ?"

Jerphanion looked around him.

"What's that big square behind us ?"

"The Place d'Italie. We can walk around it some other day. It's a rather disconcerting place, which you can't make up your mind about for some time. I find myself out of my depth in it sometimes myself, even now. But just here - how does it strike you ?"

"It surprises me. I might almost say it upsets me."

"And still, this isn't a very good time. You ought to chance upon it some time at the end of the day, just before nightfall ; when there's a little wind, a soft south-west wind, coming from down there. Do you know, the gas-lamps shine then as though they were lights at sea. Every flame flickers in a solitude. A few vehicles pass by, very far away from you. You go along this wide, quiet pavement. There's the sweep of the slope, the goal out of sight, the idea of a stream, the sense of freedom your legs have, the thoughts that come into your head. You feel as though you never wanted to go home. It seems as though the hours of evening and of night were waiting for you at the end of the slope like a ship lit up.

"By the way, there again, I think that the essential thing, the thing you can't do without, is to be young. You mustn't have any interests, in the plural. And even personal affections, as Church people call them, mustn't make a circle around you that you can't break through any more."

At this moment Gurau was just leaving Germaine's apartment. He looked along the quays towards Notre-Dame. But this view that he was so fond of could only give him back the wan smile of a wounded man.

Summoned by a note from his mistress, at an hour when she was usually still asleep, he had just heard the story of the visit that had been paid to her the night before. He had watched her face while she told him, with scarcely any exaggeration, about the threats and then the offers. He had simply said :

"All right. I must think all that over. Don't worry about it. Try to get to sleep again."

Then he had kissed her and picked up his hat.

Once he was outside, certain signs told him that he was going to be possessed by an insidious form of despair, the bitterness of whose mastery he knew already, because he had experienced it before at some milestones in his life. He understood, too, with a clarity which his cynicism about himself made quite complete, two incidents that had happened yesterday, which he had pretended to ignore, so little fond was he of cultivating dark thoughts and suspiciousness in himself.

A meeting with the Minister of Commerce, in the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies. A three-minutes' talk with the editor of his paper. Less than nothing. He could barely remember the few words they had said to him. The Minister had fired a joke at him ; something like : "So you're starting the labours of Hercules over again, are you ? It's all right if you can stand the pace." The editor, running his eyes over the article that Gurau had brought him, which dealt with foreign affairs, had made a face. "What's the matter ? Something in my article you don't like ?" "Oh no, nothing in particular." "What is it, then ?" "I really can't give you any advice, either about this or about anything else."

What counted was not the words themselves ; it was the whole atmosphere of the two incidents, the little ring of

mystery which had shot through them, the crack which one had felt opening in them; the distance which, though Gurau had refused to recognise it at the moment, suddenly separated himself and the man to whom he was talking. There was no suggestion of condemning him; there was not even any suggestion of warning him. He was in course of becoming somebody a little isolated, somebody from whom you keep your distance. There was around him a preliminary withdrawal from contact. A process of prophylaxis.

"I must take a little walk. In any direction – it doesn't matter. Along the quays, for example. Towards Notre-Dame, down there, where I used to be so fond of wandering around when I was young. I know that I'm going to be frightfully depressed. Before this depression reaches its maximum, I must be somewhere where I can recover some lingering tradition of peace of mind inside myself.

"Avoyer's threats are silly, because the man who conveyed them is an idiot. But, in all essentials, they are true. I thought I was a strong man. A man who, just by making a speech, could overthrow a government. In other words, really affect the destiny of his country. I have a name. Outside my own constituents, there are hundreds of thousands, millions – yes, millions – of other people to whom I mean something more than a tendency – a state of mind, a spirit of adventure, a chance of achieving their ideals. I thought that I was held up, in the last resort, by any number of buoys.

"Nothing but a broken reed, an illusion – all that. Treilhard bites his lips when he takes my articles. Some day soon he'll have it all fixed to make me eat my words. My question in the Chamber . . . I can see myself in advance raising it . . . to empty benches. The ridiculousness of being eloquent with nobody listening to you. No opposition. Two or three words in reply, just to bring a little difference of opinion about administration back to a proper sense of proportion. Rather absurd to waste the time of the Chamber about all this, unless there is something shady behind it. My figures disputed. Other figures put forward; data, facts

which I didn't take into account, hastily vamped up by the permanent officials.

"In the lobbies, two or three colleagues who shake my hand. 'Very fine effort. Very courageous of you.' I know who they would be. In a tone which really means: 'What the devil has bitten you? Are you trying to commit political suicide? Just about a few millions, one way or another, in the bottomless pit of the budget! As though there weren't leakages in the Ministry of Colonies, or Public Works, or Marine, twenty times as scandalous!'

"I may very well not be re-elected a couple of years from now. Last time I only just scraped through on the second ballot. This doctor that they're putting up against me. A man counts for so little. I didn't choose to line up with the Unified Party. But as I very nearly did, and as quite a number of people think that I ought to have, they regard me as something not far short of a renegade. Of course, Jaurès is nice to me, he likes me well enough, he would support me if I were in power. But he isn't a man of personal attachments – one of those men who say to you: 'My dear fellow, whatever happens you can count on me.' No, he's too much of a philosopher and a talker; he hasn't enough depth as a human being for that. He may very well let a Unified candidate stand against me, and not even make him withdraw at the second ballot, if this candidate – some tramway employee – and two or three loud-mouthed fellows on the committee have received encouragement from some mysterious source to go on with the fight. Why not, since it is 'for the good of the cause'?

"If I haven't joined the Unified Party, is it out of cowardice? Certainly not. To preserve my liberty of action? Yes, of course. Even to have a chance of getting into office? Why not? There's nothing wrong about that. If you go into politics, it is because you feel that you have a vocation not only to criticise, but also to govern. Otherwise you might as well stick to journalism. But, above all, it is because I respect my own freedom of mind, and the spirit of my time. It is contrary to everything I

have ever believed, to all the best things in my upbringing, that I should accept an opinion, a judgment, a decision, a vote, ready made, cut and dried. Descartes, Kant. The whole output of thought for the past three centuries. Even Jaurès can accommodate himself to that only because he can fall back on sophistries.

"I haven't chosen to become a Freemason, either. Fastidiousness. Distaste for something promiscuous about it. Dislike for its anti-clericalism. The midnight Mass. That ceremony I once attended at La Trappe. Notre-Dame, over there, a soft grey under the failing light. Gently conniving with the dreams of my youth. I want to be able to go and sit down, any time in my life I like, in a shadowy spot I know, opposite the most magic window in the world. The most fluorescent, the most absorbing. The one that swallows you up best. A nocturnal chant of precious stones. Your soul pierced by the rays, the colours, of a nocturnal sun.

"I may have to pay for all this. It's quite possible I shall be sunk. Another politician gone wrong. Nobody will bother to ask why. People talk about success. But failure? That's something accursed. There's no getting over it. Happily, I have always led a simple life. My apartment like a student's. My scorn of comfort. The only thing I spend much on is my food, because I have a weak stomach and a horror of messy dishes. I spend a little on toilet things, too. For books, there's always the Sainte-Geneviève Library, and the National. One of those poor devils with frayed and shiny suits. I've never looked down on them. I've never worshipped success. Oh, just look at the balustrade of that bridge, the little waves on the river, the houses at the end of the island! All the free, careless, detached pleasure one could take in them, if only it weren't for this bitterness of mine, this bitterness that swallows up everything else!

"Germaine. I'm avoiding thinking about her. Deep down in me, I've no confidence in her. Isn't that so, heart of mine? You haven't any confidence in her. Not more

selfish than anybody else, of course. Even less. Middle-class moderation. Another woman might have found my little gifts ridiculous. But if I sacrifice my career, or, instead of helping her along in hers, I compromise it, however little. . . . How upset she was just now ! . . .

"I have a kind of fear of being poor. I've always had it. Even when I was only twenty, I remember. And when you're twenty, there are still so many doors open to you. . . . Take up my profession as a lawyer again, when I've scarcely ever practised ? Who would want to have me ? And all the shady affairs, the unjust causes, the unworthy interests, of which I should become the defender and the proxy. What's the use of having played the paladin if you come down to that ? . . . The Tour Saint-Jacques . . . the Hôtel de Ville. . . . Yes, the lair of prevaricators and peculators. But all that doesn't affect either this mellow, golden air of Paris or that statue of Étienne Marcel or those fellows fishing. . . .

"Perhaps I'm taking it too much to heart. I am a man who lets things worry him too much. A black bird comes along, and black thoughts string out behind it *ad infinitum*. The two arms of the triangle of them fill the whole sky for me.

"What is my aim in life ? That's the whole question."

Meanwhile Quinette, after installing Leheudry in his new hiding-place, and furnishing him with all kinds of instructions and advice, was hurrying back to his shop in the Vaugirard district. He had to finish, that very day, the binding of Anatole France's *Jeanne d'Arc*, in two volumes, for a customer in the neighbourhood – and even, if it was possible, the binding of Verlaine's *Selected Poems*, which had been called for yesterday by that very pretty little lady with the sad eyes.


 HEADS ON THE TABLE
 

QUINETTE had just been visited by this customer, with whom he spent a good twenty minutes in polite conversation ; and, as it was nearly half past six, he was getting ready to put up his shutters when a policeman came into his shop.

He had scarcely time to be alarmed. The policeman handed him a document, and said, in a friendly tone of voice :

"I think it's asking you to call. You might see if there's any reply."

Quinette opened the letter. It was from the superintendent and requested him to call at his office as soon as possible.

"I'll come at once. Tell the superintendent that I just want to shut up my shop and then I'll be along."

"Oh, don't hurry yourself! He won't mind waiting."

The policeman saluted and departed.

Quinette said to himself sternly :

"I refuse to be alarmed. This summons is the normal consequence of my call this morning. I don't even want to try to imagine what they've got to say to me there. The best way to be prepared is to arrive with a perfectly easy mind."

In the lobby of the police-station he met the orderly who had brought him the note.

"Oh, there you are. Come this way."

They went up to the first floor.

"I'll go and say you're here."

The orderly was back in a few moments and ushered Quinette into a little office where there were two men: one, sitting down, whom the bookbinder did not know; and another, standing up, who was the inspector whom he had met that morning. The two men were studying a score or so of little photographs, spread out on the table like a pack of cards, in the circle of light cast downwards by a green cardboard shade.

As Quinette came in, the man who was sitting down assembled the photographs into a pack.

"Good evening, monsieur," said the inspector. "I have got together from all directions a certain number of photographs which resemble as closely as possible the description that you gave us. It hasn't been very easy. Sit down here. I want you to look at them one by one, carefully. Don't get excited. For that matter, you don't look like a man who does get excited. If you recognise your man definitely, that's an end of it. But you may find that you are not sure. Most of these photos are fairly good, but many of them are not recent. The man may have changed. Another thing that may happen is that you may have the impression that none of these heads here is your man, but that two or three are pretty close to his type, bordering upon it, so to speak. That in itself would help us. Well, let's get started."

"He's just pointed out to me," Quinette said to himself, "three ways in which I can get out of this. But the essential thing, above all, is that I should see clearly, right in front of my nose, the imaginary face which I described to them. For the moment I can't see anything but the lines on paper in which I described it. Folded up in my pocket. Unfortunately that's not quite the same thing."

He took the pack of photos which was handed to him. If he wanted contact with the police, he certainly had it now. This was something to make the heart of a neophyte beat faster. Before making a start he concentrated more intensely. He tried to fit the bits of a face which he had

invented firmly against one another, to tighten them up, as you do in a printing-chase.

"Don't stop to think too long," the inspector said to him. "If necessary, you can stop to think afterwards. There's nothing so valuable as one's first impression."

Quinette looked at the photos one by one. To avoid pretending reactions which might ring false, he adopted the attitude of a man extremely sure of himself, for whose involuntary movements it is idle to watch out. To begin with, this would add to the policemen's respect for him; and he valued their respect.

While the heads slid over one another, revealed themselves, hid themselves, went back into the pack, all equally sinister and doomed, it seemed to him, to early contemplation of the guillotine some morning, the bookbinder exerted himself to classify them according to their degree of concordance with his imaginary description. It was not so easy. What attracted his intention every time, except in very few cases, was not the detail of the features, but the expression of the face as a whole, and even of the whole man through his face—the feeling of bitter ill will, of sourness, of defiance, which the head broadcast into space like an inexhaustible radiation.

"If I had ever seen them," he thought, "if I had ever set eyes on any one of them, I should recognise him immediately. What it comes to is that a description doesn't amount to much. It only counts when it applies to somebody who is part of the usual quarry of the police. Even then the search has to be in the right direction."

He came to the end of the pack.

"Well, nothing doing?" asked the inspector.

The bookbinder stroked his beard. He took his time. He was not sure yet what he was going to say. There were three possible replies. He found it pleasant to reflect that the whole sequence of events depended upon his whim. They were there in front of him like bunches of grapes, each appetising in its own way. He had only to open his mouth to enjoy whichever he chose. Which should he

choose? At that moment caution had more difficulty in making its voice heard than his taste for the dramatic, his longing for the utmost possible excitement.

"I could point out one of these men, just as though I were the finger of God. I could be quite definite. An exciting sequel, in any case. . . ."

But suppose there were a trap? Suppose the policemen, to make sure of his good faith, had slipped into the pack a few photos of men who were dead or had been in prison for months?

"I find myself very much perplexed, gentlemen. One of these photos has a disquieting resemblance to the man who came to my place. Disquieting, but not convincing."

"Which one?"

"Wait a moment. . . ."

He had not yet chosen one. He spread out the pack again. Between finger and thumb he picked one out, at random, as a child, after hesitating a long time, suddenly decides upon one out of a number of cakes in a shop. He pushed it across the table.

"This one."

It was his turn to spy upon the police. There was nothing suspicious about their reaction. They, too, seemed to be interrogating the photo and interrogating themselves.

"None of the others gives you the same impression?"

"None. But I repeat that it's not a very decided impression."

The inspector glanced at his colleague; then he went on:

"Have you got five minutes more to spare?"

"Certainly."

"Then would you just step into the next room, monsieur? I'll send for you again in a moment."

Quinette found himself back in the room where he had been a few minutes before, which served as a waiting-room. He sat down on a bench. Perhaps he felt a vague sense of alarm; but this alarm itself made up a part of the extreme interest which at this moment he felt in being alive. It was one of the elements in a bundle.

The inspector opened the door and summoned him :  
 " Monsieur."

In the little office the other policeman was now standing up.

" Are you at liberty this evening ? " he asked.

His tone of voice was measured ; his intentions impenetrable. Quinette summoned up all his common sense to still the surge of panic that washed over his body.

" This evening ? . . . It's not very convenient. . . . To begin with, I haven't had dinner yet. . . ."

" Oh, you could have dinner with us."

What did that mean ? Have a couple of dishes brought in to him from a neighbouring restaurant, as they do with people detained at a police-station, while elsewhere, in a magistrate's office, they are taking out a warrant for their arrest ? Unlikely. Contrary to all probability. Unless Leheudry had been pinched that very afternoon and had made a statement ? In that case the clairvoyance of the police, the ability and the rapidity of their investigations, far exceeded the bookbinder's previous idea of them and, indeed, exceeded any explanation that his mind could imagine. Quinette felt germinating in him that semi-supernatural idea about the police which haunts the dreams of bad characters and invests the police in their eyes with all the fascination of divinity. But he was not so simple-minded as that. He fought down this confused imagining.

He pretended to take the invitation to dinner as a well-meant joke. He replied, with a laugh :

" Thanks, gentlemen . . . thanks very much. . . ."

" I'm speaking quite seriously. We can go and have something to eat together, all three of us, within the next few minutes, if you are hungry, and then—— No, better not. It would be better to start as soon as we can and eat when we have time. We have just been telephoning. There's a chance, at about this time, that we may find the man whose photo you picked out in a certain place. You could look at him at your ease. You could tell us : ' That's he,' or

‘That’s not he,’ and the question would be settled one way or the other.”

Quinette felt more and more reassured from one sentence to the next.

“Oh yes, I see.”

“It may not be a method of procedure which is quite in accordance with police regulations. But when one is dealing with an intelligent and responsible man like yourself, it’s a thing we can quite well do. If I save the examining magistrate some work, he won’t hold it against me. And so far as dinner is concerned, the least I can do is to invite you, when I am putting you to all this trouble.”

To take part in a police expedition, even if it led to a mare’s nest, on this footing of equality, almost of comradeship – nothing could answer better to Quinette’s secret desires. He was burning to accept. But he had promised to rejoin Leheudry before half past seven. Leheudry was under definite instructions not to stir until that time. The bookbinder was late already. Half past seven. The Métro would not take him there fast enough. He would have to reconcile himself to the expense of a taxi. The important thing was not to give Leheudry the smallest pretext for a breach of discipline.

“I’m really very sorry, gentlemen ; but I have an appointment which I am bound to keep. I couldn’t foresee this. Give me until nine o’clock. After that I shall be entirely at your disposal.”

“Very well. We’ll try to make other arrangements. Come to the Quai des Orfèvres about nine o’clock. Go in through the entrance which opens directly on to the quay. The one that leads to the First President’s Court. Remember the name. We shall be waiting for you there, my colleague and I. If we are late, wait for us a minute. Tell the door-keeper that you have an appointment with Monsieur Lespinas.”

ON THE BANKS OF THE CANAL

QUINETTE reached the second inner courtyard of 142a faubourg Saint-Denis and went up staircase J as far as the third floor, without anybody's noticing him. He knocked discreetly at the door of the little apartment. No reply. Quinette felt the same anger as he had experienced yesterday in the rue Taillepain.

"He's a fellow who's never there. Always on the wing. You can't have any confidence in him. No strength of character. A ne'er-do-well. It's true that it's seven thirty-two. But I didn't meet him on the way. He must have been gone some time."

Despite his dislike of doing so, the bookbinder had to address himself to the concierge.

"Oh yes, your clerk left a note for you with me."

The note was carefully folded up, like those little packets of salts that you buy at chemists'. Inside there were three lines in a handwriting that was not too bad, but overladen with twists and twirls.

"Having waited for you until past the time, I am going to have a drink in the rue des Récollets, the second bar on the right."

All the "t's" were capital letters, and so was the "b" of "bar."

Once he was outside, Quinette let his wrath explode.

"Everything was going so well! I should be happy if it wasn't for him."

As he walked round the Est station, he had his fists clenched all the time.

In the rue des Récollets his mere anger led him without any hesitation to the badly lit front of a wine-shop, just as a starving dog runs straight to a rabbit-hole. He opened the door, walked straight into the bar, saw Leheudry sitting at a table at the first glance, tapped him on the shoulder — “Hallo, are you coming?” — turned around again, and walked out; all this so decidedly and so quickly that the other customers scarcely had time to see the back of him. He waited for Leheudry a few steps further on, in the direction of the canal.

Leheudry came along in no hurry.

“You don’t care a damn about what I say,” Quinette began.

“Maybe I don’t. You’re not going to shut me up like that from morning till night. I’ve had enough of it.”

The printer’s face had an expression of rebelliousness intermingled with fear.

“What’s that you say? What’s that you have the nerve to say to me? I spend all my time looking after you. I go from one end of Paris to the other, God knows how many times a day, all for your sake. I take steps, and extremely dangerous ones, which you don’t even know anything about. And not only do you disobey all the instructions I give you, but——”

“Instructions, eh? Why, this is worse than prison! Let me tell you that I’d sooner go to prison.”

“You fool! Don’t shout like that. You fool!”

Quinette blurted the words right into his face, through clenched teeth, in the darkness of the street.

“Fool, am I?” the other repeated. “Nobody’s got any brains but yourself, I suppose. And look what you do with them. Shutting me up like that! Making away with a man! You didn’t even think of one thing, which is that there’s no light in that hole of yours. So I had to stay there in the dark, from five o’clock till seven o’clock and

after. With all that's on my mind at this moment ! It's enough to drive a man mad."

"You hadn't got any light ? Then how did you write that note you left for me ?"

"There's a gas-jet in the kitchen. I had to go and sit in the kitchen."

"Isn't that too bad ! Weren't you well enough off in the kitchen ?"

"A kitchen that's about as big as a water-closet ! Why didn't you shut me up in a water-closet while you were about it ?"

"I suppose you want a library, or a drawing-room, with a cut-glass chandelier ?"

Leheudry shrugged his shoulders.

"I tell you that it will drive me mad. This can't go on."

"Oh, you think it can't go on, do you ?"

Quinette treated Leheudry's neck to the hardest possible stare out of his deep-set eyes. Then his stare shifted along his neck. It drew around his neck the equivalent of one of those charcoal lines that serve to guide a saw. Quinette became conscious of the analogy, and it pleased him. He realised that this was a pleasure best enjoyed in silence. He managed to keep quiet.

The two men reached the bank of the Saint-Martin canal.

"Where are you taking me to ?" asked the printer.

Quinette did not reply at once.

"Where are you taking me to ?"

His tone of voice was already a little more humble.

"Where am I taking you to ? Nowhere in particular. I want something to eat. I'm looking for a place."

"You won't find any place here."

"What do you know about it ?"

"You'll find one around the station, or in the faubourg Saint-Martin ; but not here along the canal."

"Yes, I shall. There are little taverns where bargees get meals and where we shall be alone at this time of day."

Quinette went on with a sneer :

DDG

"Of course, you'd prefer a restaurant *de luxe* with a gypsy band, wouldn't you? I'm sorry you can't have it."

At long intervals a strong lamp shed a dreary light on the quay, the colour of sand. But this same light, as it fell down the bank upon the water of the canal, created oily mirrors and depths in it.

They walked along a couple of yards away from the edge, Quinette on the left, Leheudry on the side nearest the water. Leheudry, though he showed no uneasiness, kept moving over towards the left; but Quinette, imperceptibly, kept on edging him back towards the right. Sometimes the uneven edge of a paving-stone, or a mooring-ring, came in their way.

Quinette was not feeling angry any longer. The place where they were seemed to him in some obscure way favourable, made his heart beat faster, disturbed him with a kind of promise of pleasure, just as places consecrated to physical love disturb the novice who enters them, by their setting and their emanations. The effect upon the book-binder was to give him a state of feeling much more intense, more lyrical, than mere well-being. Through it ran thoughts agile as dreams, but in appearance as cold as calculations. Their cruel precision lost nothing by letting themselves be carried along by this kind of musical exaltation.

"His foot might hit against a paving-stone. His foot might catch in a ring. How could he save himself? Scarcely a stagger. Preferably at the edge of a lock. A sheer drop. A big splash in the water. . . ."

But Leheudry was walking along pretty carefully, avoiding any obstacles. It would be difficult for him to lose his footing, all by himself. Could he swim? His clothes would hamper him. The water was cold. There were places where the canal was embanked. A slippery wall. The skin was scraped off your hands in vain; and you had to go on swimming. You might cry for help, but you would have no breath left.

"Nobody about. Myself the only witness. It would be all over. I shouldn't have to keep an eye on him any longer.

or worry about him, or waste my time over him. Who would care if he disappeared ? For all practical purposes, he has disappeared already. Who does care ? That plump little person in the rue Vandamme. Easy. A few more visits to her. Just to keep the story going. Bring it to an end somehow. I should have plenty of time for all that.

"My appointment on the Quai des Orfèvres. I'm going to keep it, in any case. Cordiality, courtesy, mutual respect. I might really put them on a scent. Further rendezvous. Consultations, exchanges of ideas. My scrupulous moderation. How pleasant the future might be, if only I had not to drag this fellow along with me like a fetter ! Pity ? Did he show any ? He's a criminal. If he could have got me arrested instead of himself. . . . That bloody rag folded up in the jacket.

"Yes, but the canal gives up its dead, sooner or later. 'Found floating between two barges.' Or else : 'A bargee on board the *Hirondelle* fished it up by chance with his boat-hook.' The morgue. Identification ? Perhaps. Hypothesis of a crime. Inquiry about the criminal and the motive. Endless complications. Danger. That plump little person talking about my visit : the 'bearded lawyer.' Might even go so far, in her flurry, as to confess about the safe. Immense danger. . . ."

On the opposite bank was to be seen the lighted front of a bar-room. Leheudry pointed it out to him.

"Well, won't that suit you ?"

"We'll see. Anyway, we have to go on to the next bridge. . . ."

Quinette did not want to let go so soon of the enjoyment which his dreaming gave him. It was a dreaming which required certain propitious conditions around it. It was a dreaming which would lose some of its strength if it had not the support of the very circumstance in which he was living. A dreaming whose charm was that it walked step by step with reality ; just as Leheudry was walking along the bank of the canal ; a dreaming which had only one movement to make to turn into reality.

"Suicide. . . . Yes, suicide. Solution of all the difficulties at once. 'The body of the murderer in the rue Dailloud has just been found.' Killed himself. Suppose, this very night, I sent a letter signed by him to the coroner, or to a local police superintendent – the one in the neighbourhood where he used to live. 'It was I who killed the old woman. I am gnawed by remorse. I am going to commit suicide.' Two or three details about the crime, to clinch matters. In his own style. With the note that I have in my pocket, I could manage to imitate his handwriting pretty well. Besides, would they take the trouble to submit it to experts? Will they have any other piece of his writing, even? Not too marked a dissimilarity from his own – that's all that's required. I bet I could do that all right.

"When I leave the Quai des Orfèvres, I go and sit down in the back room of a deserted café. I make up the letter. I throw it into some out-of-the-way letter-box, where there is no collection after eight or nine o'clock at night. No indication about the method of suicide. The police get the letter to-morrow; and they pay more or less attention to it. The papers have only a couple of lines about it. They must get a number of letters like that, from crazy people and practical jokers, in the course of an investigation. They make general inquiries about this Leheudry. I don't give any address for him in the letter. The investigation goes on in other directions. In a fortnight a bargee fishes up the body. Everything agrees. Everything is explained. The case is closed."

To tell the truth, that thought: "the case is closed," gave Quinette as much regret as relief. What would become of him, into what morass of boredom would he slip back, once the case was closed? He felt the contact of his electric belt, its faithful clinging. Had he still got faith in this apparatus? Scarcely. But he hesitated to separate himself from it. He no longer expected any definite support from it. But if he put it aside, he would be afraid of something like the vengeance of a woman whom you have deserted.

The quay was blocked by sacks of cement. They would

have to leave the waterside. The bridge was close ahead. They might go and have a bite to eat at the wine-shop whose lights were shining opposite. Only stay about ten minutes. Just long enough to get Leheudry to drink a glass of wine, or even a whole bottle. Then a glass of spirits, to wind up with. After that they could continue along the canal, on the other bank. A man who has drunk a whole bottle of wine, in ten minutes, without eating much, and a glass of spirits afterwards, loses his footing very easily. If he falls into the water, the cold gets him and gives him a heart-attack. He sinks without a struggle.

"And suppose I gave him a violent shove at the right moment, what would happen? I'm not very strong; but neither is he, especially when he has had something to drink. I should have to get him quite close to the water, and at the same time take him completely off his guard. The danger, the difficulty that still remains insoluble, is that plump little woman in the rue Vandamme. I made a very bad mistake in having anything to do with her. It would have been such a splendid arrangement otherwise."

Quinette reflected about the problem of crime in general. Compared with crime, any other activities in life are relatively easy. They can be reconciled with many negligences, many errors of detail. The mind is not bound to keep before it all the time, with rigorous clearness, all the ins and outs of an action, without overlooking a single one of them. Sometimes it may even drowse, like a waggoner over easy stages of his road. Anybody coming the other way and meeting him does not mind very much; and, even if he does, his power of offence cannot be exercised freely. Society protects people against one another in myriad ways, checks their mutual pursuit, and prevents your adversary from making the most of your mistakes. But when society is itself your adversary, it recognises no tempering of the wind, no neutral ground. Out of your smallest slip it makes a slip-knot which will hang you.

So it is not surprising that so few crimes are undertakings which turn out well. The less so in that most of

those who commit them are people with some kind of flaw. They lack brains or strength of character, often both together. They act in obedience to the baser passions. They have a taste for blood, or, if not, at least a horror of regular work, an ingrained idleness. In short, they are, quite simply, criminals. Whereas there might be "authors of crime."

"I might make up a second letter for the rue Vandamme. Good-bye to the lady-love. She is too much of a fool to notice any difference in the writing. Besides, emotion would blind her eyes. There remain the safe and the parcel. . . . How can a man as well endowed as I am come to commit a crime? Because he makes up his mind, at a given moment, that crime is the most logical way out. I don't like that word 'crime.' I don't quite see what it answers to. The parcel in the safe. I must get hold of that at all costs. The letter might contain one last request: 'I beg you to hand over the parcel to my lawyer.' No more precise reference. No confession. Simply: 'I am killing myself to escape dishonour. I have entrusted my lawyer with clearing my memory. In the name of all you hold most sacred, help him.'"

As he said these words inside himself, he looked at the man to whom he was lending them, who was walking in silence beside him. The printer's face was beginning to catch the light from the inn, now much nearer and stronger than any street-lamp. The pockets under his grey eyes looked like marks left by an executioner's thumb on flesh already mortified.

On the glass of the front was a sign: "The Boatman of Lizy," and "Refreshments at all hours."

"Are we going in?" asked Leheudry.

And Quinette rediscovered his usual courtesy as he replied:

"Yes, certainly, if you like."

  
 A PROFITABLE CONVERSATION  


“THE door-keeper tells me that you have been waiting since nine o'clock. You are a punctual person.”

“I try to be.”

“Come into this office here. There's nobody in it. I don't think Monsieur Lespinas will be very long now.”

“Have you laid hands on the man of the photo?”

“I'm not sure. I haven't been looking after that. I've been busy elsewhere. I got word of a man wounded in the hand who turned up at Necker on the day in question. However, we'll see about that.”

“What an interesting profession yours is, monsieur!”

“Do you think so?”

“Yes. Sometimes I'm sorry that I didn't turn that way myself.”

“Don't get the idea that it's always exciting.”

“But it's never dull, is it—as it is in so many other professions?”

“I can scarcely draw any comparison. I've been in it ever since I finished my military service. It's certainly true that anybody who wants to risk his skin. . . . When I was younger than I am now, I was wild about that. I did everything I possibly could to take part in dangerous work. Several times I nearly lost my life.”

“Were you ever wounded?”

“Yes. But nothing very serious. In that way I've always been lucky. I got a bullet through my forearm. I still have the scars of it. The fellow shot at me through his

side-pocket. That was my worst wound. So you see! But another time I got chucked into the water."

"Really?"

"Into the canal. A couple of bastards I was after who lay in wait for me."

"Where was this?"

"The Quai de l'Oise. Right opposite the rue des Ardennes. Ten yards away from the railway bridge. Right in the shadow of the bridge. I haven't forgotten that, you may imagine."

"Is it a bad neighbourhood about there?"

"All the canal is dangerous, especially late at night."

"You managed to get out?"

"I swim pretty well. But that would not have saved me, clothed as I was and stunned by the blow of a fist. . . . I had an astonishing piece of luck. I happened to get hold of a half-submerged canoe. I should have finished sinking it, but it was moored with a rope. I don't know just how I came to. I hung on to one side of the canoe and to the rope. My two bastards had bolted. All the same, I didn't show myself at once. I remember that I stayed a good quarter of an hour shivering under the bridge. Then I heard a cab coming along. It was quite a job to get the cabby to make up his mind to take me."

"It surprises me that more people don't get thrown into the canal. It seems so easy."

"Well, a good few do get thrown in."

"Not so many, from all one reads. Unless there are some who are never found. What do you think? Does the canal give up all its bodies?"

"They say it does. By the way, talking about that, I had an even worse time once. In the quarries at Bagnolet. Do you know them?"

"No."

"I only went back there once afterwards. Everything was very much the same. I don't know whether the place has changed since. It's possible. At that time, it was the most out-of-the-way place you could imagine. There were

very deep galleries. At night they served as a shelter for all kinds of scum. It was a shifting population. In general, I don't know why, they didn't stay very long. There were ordinary fly-by-nights, of course. Then, for some months, perverses organised some fine parties there. Some people quite high up in society took part in them, it was said. At other times there was nobody there at all.

"Well, this time I'm telling you about a gang of burglars, who operated especially in the neighbourhood of Saint-Mandé and Vincennes, had established their headquarters at the end of one of these galleries. Dangerous fellows, who always went for the best country-houses and were suspected of having done worse than that on two or three occasions. I told you that I was young. I dreamed about nothing but police work in heroic circumstances. I had a chief who understood this and was very fond of me. Well, I disguised myself as a tramp, and I was to be seen wandering about the galleries in my rags and with my knapsack, with a loaf of bread sticking out of it. I used to sleep curled up in a corner. They ended by not taking any notice of me. I was just like a dog there, but a dog who knew French, and slang too. One day, I don't know whether it was that it struck them there was something odd about me - I'm bound to say I looked a bit young for an old hand, in spite of my beard and the dirt of me. Or they may have followed me outside. Anyway, they attacked me, tied me up, gagged me - not very effectively, though - and carried me right to the end of the gallery. I thought my last hour had come."

"Didn't you put up a fight?"

"What was the use? I didn't even make a sound. In cases like that, you mustn't spoil the last chance you have left. But I didn't know what was coming to me. Four days later I was still there. Bound, dying of hunger, and with the ropes cutting into my flesh in various places. It was only the gag that had slipped. But shouting didn't do me much good. In the depths of that gallery one's voice was stifled. All my shouting didn't bring anybody."

"Weren't your chiefs or your comrades anxious about you ? Or your family ?"

"I was a bachelor. I used to go and see my parents once a week or once a fortnight. They weren't likely to be surprised at the hotel where I lived, either. I slept out so often. So far as the station was concerned, I was out of luck. The Russian Sovereigns were paying a visit. Everything was more or less topsy-turvy. Still, my chief got worried about my absence. He even sent to look for me in the quarries. But I had merely spoken about a gallery, without being more definite than that. I don't know whether they looked very thoroughly. I recognise that it was a hard job."

"Somebody found you finally ?"

"No. Finally I succeeded in struggling out of some of my bonds, thanks to a movement which I hadn't thought of trying before. Perhaps, too, it was because I had got thin. You've no idea how thin one can get in four days, especially when one is a heavy feeder, as I was."

"You mean to say that nobody came into that gallery in four days ?"

"No. It was the most remote of all of them."

"Or anywhere near it ?"

"I suppose not. I told you that the population kept shifting."

Quinette found some difficulty in disguising the nature of his curiosity. He drove back certain questions that rose to his lips, and compelled them to take another way round or wear a mask.

"At the very gates of Paris ? It's almost incredible. I suppose the police have cleaned it all up by now ?"

"I don't think so. We may have made a few raids. There were times, as I say, when it cleaned itself up. Besides, it's private property."

"The quarries aren't being worked any more ?"

"The last time I was there, I saw a spur track and a couple of trucks. I got the impression that they were tinkering about in one of the galleries."

"Well, that's a good thing. If the quarries are being worked, however little, there must be night-watchmen, and that would keep bandits away, I suppose? So much the better. That's one den of thieves less, anyway."

"No, even if they have put on a couple of night-watchmen, what could they do in an area as big as that? They would simply snore around a fire and hope that they would be left alone. . . . But why should there be any night-watchmen? You have a lumber-yard guarded because there's plenty of material that people can carry off. But what's worth taking there?"

"So another adventure like yours might still happen?"

"Why? Do you want it to happen to you?"

Quinette turned pale, smiled, and put on the air of a man who sees a good joke rather belatedly. Then he said:

"Yes indeed, when I was younger, I think I should have been just as keen about it as yourself."

"You really think that it might have been your vocation?"

"Yes. Even now, if such things are possible, I should be delighted to give up my spare time to inquiries, any little investigations. . . ."

"If you were in any other line of business—a wine-merchant, for example, or even a news-agent—we should be only too glad to make use of you. . . . But in a shop like yours you don't get many people—people who interest us. Or, again, if you had access to extremist circles in politics—— That isn't the case, is it?"

"No. Not at the moment."

"Still, I'll mention the matter to my chiefs. Outside our regular organisation we haven't got so many people with brains and a sense of responsibility. There are some bad eggs whom we have to use, that you've got to handle with a pair of tongs. I may tell you that if, in connection with your visitor with the bloody hands, you have the luck to put us on to a good scent, the authorities will be only too glad to make themselves agreeable to you. You couldn't have a better recommendation."

"Do you really mean that? People say that witnesses let themselves in for more trouble than anything else."

"Before the examining magistrate sometimes, or with the lawyers; but not with us, if they have really been useful to us. . . . On the contrary, this is a place where we know the meaning of the word 'gratitude.' Hallo, I hear Monsieur Lespinas's voice. I'll just go and see what's happening. I'll be back in a moment."

Quinette was left in the office, whose exact function he did not know, but which was, in any case, a police office. He could have sipped the pleasure of his presence in such a place if only he had had any leisure for that kind of appreciation. But his head was going round and round. He was intoxicated with the prospect of having to choose among several visions of the immediate future which rivalled one another in intensity. He could not bring himself to give up any of them. He postponed any debate inside himself which would involve separating them from one another. He hoped that, by dint of floating together before his eyes, they would end by merging into a single whole. This logical man reached the point of wishing that his reasoning power would leave him alone.

The inspector came back.

"Come this way."

They left the office together.

"This is serious business now. Above all, don't try to make any suggestions to yourself. Don't even ask yourself any questions. Your first glance will have to tell you yes or no."

They turned down a long passage. About twenty yards. About twenty seconds in front of him. Not a question any longer of toying with a choice as he stroked his beard. Less than twenty seconds, and he would come to a cross-road of events which you reached like a car going at full speed. Turn to the right or turn to the left. No middle course. And no time to hesitate.

The inspector opened a door. Quinette caught a glimpse of M. Lespinas sitting at a little table, and several men sitting

on a bench. Four, to be exact, who stood up as the door opened. At the sight of them Quinette was seized with a temptation so violent that it felt like some instrument being twisted around between his stomach and his chest. Point out one of these men for the assizes and the scaffold. Point him out in a spasm of the will to power. , ,

He resisted the temptation, just as a tramp resists the temptation to rape a shepherd-girl. He resisted it so strongly that his little black eyes opened their widest, and the sweat ran down his forehead. He walked past the four men, forcing himself, despite everything, to look at them. He turned back towards M. Lespinas, who was watching him. He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his arms a little, murmuring :

“No. . . . He’s not there. . . . None of them.”

He felt a sudden, an abysmal, sinking of nervous pressure that was almost unendurable. Something inside him delivered sentence : “It’s Leheudry who will have to pay for this.”



QUINETTE DROWSES BEFORE  
DAWN



“THE entrance to the quarries. The night-watchman. No, there isn’t any night-watchman. The clay. I’ve got a lantern. Or have I got a lantern? The clay. The spur track. I shan’t be able to pick my way through all that unless I have a lantern. A lantern swinging between him and me. No, I’d rather depend on the light in the sky. The reflection of the lights of Paris in the sky. The entrance to the quarry. The big hole where you go in. The cave. The cave on the Buttes-Chaumont.”

He refused to go on. He slipped in the clay. The two of them slipped. He slipped on purpose. The lantern dropped out of his hands. There was no light left. “I refuse to go on.” He fell on his knees on purpose.

The entrance to the quarries. The black cut. That hole, badly cut out with scissors. It would have to be cut out more. Hold the scissors farther away. Give them a good twist when you get to the top.

They would never get there. He refused to go on. The night-watchman swung his lantern. No, there wasn’t any night-watchman. There wasn’t any lantern. The reflection of the lights of Paris shone on the spur track.

He repeated : “I will not go on.” The entrance to the cave. They must get to the end of it. Bring him along to the end of it. The catacombs. How well the bones were preserved !

He said : “I will not go on.” Thirty paces more to the

entrance of the cave. They must get to the end of it. Sophie Parent is waiting for you.

The lantern lit up his face. No more face. He must put out the lantern. The reflection of Paris lit up his face. No more face.

I don't want to see that face any more. I must put out the look of his eyes.

The entrance to the cave. We've got to the entrance. Sophie Parent is waiting for you at the other end. It's dark here. But Sophie Parent is at the other end. Sophie Parent in her shop is at the other end ; sitting in plenty of light.

Hide your face. Pass your hand over your face and rub it away little by little. Fish eat the faces of drowned men. Rub hard with your hand. The nose is gone. The chin is gone.

The entrance to the quarry. Is it wet ? No. Barely damp. One is better off here than in the canal. Right at the end you'll be better off than in the canal.

He says : " I'm not going any farther." Sophie Parent is waiting for you. Who said anything about the canal ? There isn't any water. There's only Sophie Parent, sitting in the light. There is also - how does that happen ? - that little lady whose book I ought to finish to-morrow morning.

The light consumes your face.

He says : " Sophie Parent isn't there. I'm not going any further." But she is. Go along in. I tell you she is.

I must kill him while his back is turned. I must kill him when he gets right to the end. Go on. Hurry up. Sophie Parent is waiting for you.

Did anybody hear the shot ? The night-watchman didn't hear it. There is no night-watchman. Sophie Parent is there, but she didn't hear it.

Bang ! right at the end. In the hollow of the rock. There's enough light. A soft light. You will be better off than in the canal.

Thou shalt not kill. One must never kill. Men die like flies. One kills flies.

The burglar sleeps like a hunting dog. He sleeps like a dog. He didn't hear it.

"Don't kill me!" "Oh, don't worry!" I could kill a dozen more like you.

"Do you want my money?" "Oh, don't worry!"

The entrance. Still the main entrance. Oh, it's terrible to be always going back like this! Get on to the rails. You can see it's dry further on.

No, this isn't the canal. In the canal there isn't that soft light at the end.

I don't want to see that face of yours any more. Leave that face of yours right at the end there.

He refuses to go on. What, again? I can't kill him because the burglar is listening. The night-watchman is listening.

I can only kill you right at the end. Sophie Parent is waiting for you at the end. Love. The sunshine of love. The sun of dawn.

I will give the key to Sophie Parent so that she may put that face of yours in the safe.

Love eternal.

You will be better off there than in the canal, my friend. Turn around. Look about you. Isn't it a good place for a dead man?

## WEDNESDAY NIGHT

THEY were in the middle of dinner. So far the conversation had remained politely impersonal. They had outshone each other in talking about things which both of them knew very well were not the object of their meeting. Then a silence fell of itself. Sammécaud waited for a decent interval before breaking it.

"My dear deputy, we have just mentioned a part of the country of which I am very fond . . . of which I have happy memories and where I have very good friends, indeed . . . and which you represent with a distinction worthy of it . . . with a brilliance all your own. . . . But you see me at this moment in a rather painful position . . . the embarrassment of a man who has permitted himself – I can scarcely avoid using the word – a little deceit.

"Oh, you needn't look at me so sternly as all that! I am sure you will understand. And, in the first place, let me give you my word of honour that not a living soul knows that we are dining together this evening. So, if my – my audacity does not win your pardon, all you have to do is forget this modest dinner and my undistinguished company, and everything will be as though it had never taken place. Except for myself, for I shall always keep, in a secret little corner of my memory, the impression of a really delightful hour or so. . . ."

He coughed slightly and swept a white silk handkerchief over his moustache.

"You will remember that yesterday, at the office of your

paper, I introduced myself to you as a friend of the Bosse-bœufs. You received me in such an informal and unsuspecting kind of way that I find it difficult to tell you how really touched I was by it. As a matter of fact, the Bosse-bœufs are very good and very old friends of mine. I didn't deceive you about that. But I told you that I wanted to put a proposition before you on behalf of an arts committee in Touraine. There I did deceive you. I couldn't avoid it. You'll see why. When I sent my card in to you, you didn't notice my name particularly ? ”

“ Not particularly, I must confess.”

“ You may have come across it recently in connection with a matter which you have been investigating – in the background, to be sure. But clearly you haven't been concerning yourself most about proper names. So much the better. I propose to speak to you with absolute frankness. I got in touch with you entirely on my own initiative. I didn't consult anybody.

“ Let me begin with a confession. I am one of those men whose fate is decided for them by chance – the chance of birth, the chance of marriage. I have had to put up with a position in life which does not at all correspond with my tastes. I should have liked to travel, to jot down my impressions, to live in the world of history and art, to be a dreamer ; and to be quite free in my sentimental life, too. Pierre Loti, some of the more subtle English writers, Maurice Barrès, without his politics – not that I despise politics, but I know very little about them – those are the kind of men who would have been my masters and my models. Instead I am tied to a business which bores me and sometimes makes me sick. I have no illusions whatever about what it's all worth. I have to fight, now and then, in its interests – and, Lord, what interests they are ! – out of loyalty to my associates, because of family obligations. . . . But I don't want to fight against a man like you.”

Gurau had begun by looking at him. Then he turned his head away slightly and stared at a little cut-glass salt-cellar. He leant his right cheek on his half-opened hand. With his

other hand he played with a knife, arranged bread-crumbs in a neat row on the table-cloth. His heart was full of a calm bitterness, which he found almost a pleasure. At this moment it would have taken something very much out of the way to disappoint him or even to surprise him.

He thought about the window in Notre-Dame. The little cut-glass salt-cellar had scintillations that were rather mysterious, rather fine. The cloth developed a whiteness which seemed enormous. What did one know about it? Who was to measure these things? There seemed to be active exchanges between objects, of a mystical or purely spiritual kind, in which man, for all his enterprise, was not invited to take part. A kind of ant-hill life. Thousands and thousands of ant-trails in shining sand. Sportsmen, busy in pursuit of prey, put their big feet on all this.

As the other man had stopped talking, Gurau finally said, in the most formal tone of voice :

"I might have something to say to you about the means which you have adopted of forcing this conversation upon me. We can return to that later. Meanwhile, since we are here—— Go on, monsieur — I'm listening."

"I see you're judging me harshly. . . . But I beg you not to make that a reason for letting this dish get cold. It's no good unless it is eaten quite hot. . . . May I help you? Allow me. . . . Don't suppose for a moment that I am acting as an emissary of anybody else at all. On the contrary, I should get into very hot water if anybody knew. . . . You see, monsieur, I have been present at meetings, and taken part in them, at which there was a lot of talk about you. I spoke against you myself. I'm not denying it. But when I thought it over, it made me sick. Since yesterday morning especially. You have no idea how far I've got. Look here, my dear sir : a system which makes situations like this possible, which makes them inevitable, is an abominable system. A state of society like ours is damnable."

Not only did Sammécaud's tone ring true ; but you had also the impression that he was suddenly giving expression, and for the first time, to thoughts which he had only just

discovered deep down in himself, and that he was airing them with an uneasy sense of relief. Gurau, accustomed as he was to scenting deceit in many of its forms, raised his head and looked at the man.

"Can he be lying? And if so, to what extent?"

"But, monsieur," he said aloud, "I hardly know where I am, in the midst of all these rather contradictory things you are saying to me. . . . About yourself, in the first place . . . I'm not making any mistake, am I?"

"I don't think you are making any mistake at the moment. I am Roger Sammécaud. I belong to the oil trust. I have a twofold interest in it, through my wife and on my own account. I am one of the people who during the last few days have started a campaign against you. I have discussed with them the best way of hemming you in, of crushing you, to put it bluntly. You see I'm not trying to hide anything."

"But then, monsieur, it is the object of this meeting—you admit, don't you, that you arranged it in spite of me, thanks to a kind of trap——?"

"I admit that."

"It is the object of this meeting that I don't quite understand."

The bell rang, and Sampeyre got up to go and open the door. Mathilde Cazalis tried to forestall him. While he and the pretty girl were disputing in politeness, Clanricard reached the door.

"I don't mind Clanricard. But I'm not going to let you do it."

"But why not? I should be very proud to go and open the door. For that matter, I should be very proud to do anything whatever here."

"I must get you to repeat that to Madame Schütz. It will give her a better idea of her duties."

Sampeyre laughed—that laugh of his which shook his beard and his chest.

"Talking about Madame Schütz, I must try to induce her

to give me the benefit of her services on Wednesday evenings. These receptions of mine don't shine from the point of view of domestic staff. . . . Hallo, here's Laulerque. We must get him to give us his opinion without letting him have time to catch his breath."

Laulerque came in and shook hands.

"What about?"

"A statement appeared this morning which seems to be, as they say, 'inspired.' It boils down to this: 'There is little hope left of preventing Bulgaria and Turkey from fighting. But in any case the war will remain localised.' I remember the words: localised 'to certain parts of the Balkans.' No international complications to be feared."

"It would still be war," said Louise Argellati, old but still beautiful, with her thick, curly white hair, her black eyes, her full, melodious voice.

"Yes, but we are entitled to be a bit selfish. Even apart from selfishness, a Balkan war, from the point of view of humanity, doesn't possess the significance of a general European war. But I want to hear Laulerque's opinion about the statement."

Laulerque's thin face creased into a smile. Laulerque held himself in. He felt that he had talked too much the last Wednesday evening and with too much vehemence. He had promised himself that he would keep calm this evening. He would listen to the others.

"Why, if that's so," he murmured, "it's very good news. Very good indeed. Everything is coming out all right."

"Here's Laulerque playing the optimist," said Mathilde Cazalis, with a laugh.

Laulerque shot a quick glance at her.

"This evening," he said to himself, "she looks so pretty that it goes to your heart. I forbid myself to think about her. I swear that I won't start spouting and trying to make her think me brilliant. Such showing off is unworthy of me. It's intolerable, it's hateful, that an idea should be inflated and exaggerated and twisted out of shape just because you've

got those lovely lips in front of you, and those eyes, and that surprised smile of hers."

He answered sedately :

"I'm always an optimist. It's the basis of my character."

"So," Sampeyre went on, "you think that this statement sums up the situation correctly?"

"I beg your pardon. . . . What is there in it that strikes you as arguable?"

"The essential part of it – what it says at the end."

"Oh, yes?"

The whole group surrounded Laulerque in smiling, rather teasing silence. Louise Argellati, sitting in the arm-chair which had been moved over for her from the right-hand side of the window to the left-hand corner, bent forward as though to miss nothing of what the young man might say. Mathilde Cazalis pouted almost imperceptibly and looked disappointed. Even Sampeyre had an air of "waiting for the answer" which reminded Laulerque of former classes at the Auteuil primary school. Legraverend and Darnould looked at each other in amused expectation. Only Clanricard, standing up with his back to the long bookcase, went on thinking to himself.

Laulerque was not to be caught by this tacit provocation which converged upon him from all directions. That did not prevent it from working upon him, or his mind from responding to it with an almost intolerable itchiness.

He looked at Legraverend, Louise Argellati, and Darnould one after the other. He raised his head towards Clanricard. Then, in a tone of voice so circumspect that it sounded flat, he asked :

"Is there anybody here who attaches any importance to the principal part of this statement?"

The group breathed again, as you breathe again at the first crackling of a wood fire which at first has refused to catch. Laulerque blinked his eyes. His nostrils quivered a little. He felt that if he had Mathilde Cazalis in his arms he could bite her in order to punish her for the sudden satisfaction which she registered. Sampeyre, who did not

fail to notice the signs of effervescence on the part of the young man, was amused by it; but he insisted upon reminding him that he was not to be played with.

"It's not a question of taking it quite literally; but some of us think that it more or less corresponds with the facts."

"You don't, in any case, Monsieur Sampeyre."

"Why not?"

"I remember what you said last Wednesday."

"I may have changed my mind since last Wednesday."

Laulerque looked around the circle of faces again as though he were questioning them. Then he turned back to Sampeyre.

"If I weren't afraid of hurting somebody here - I'm not trying to guess whom - I know very well what I should say."

"Say it! Say it!"

"... That this statement, in its essential part, is a glaring asininity."

Laulerque's voice had suddenly tripled in intensity. The whole group burst out laughing, even Louise Argellati, whose laugh, more volatile than her voice, and older, too, perhaps, seemed to have the silvery shade of her hair; even Mme Legraverend, usually so reserved. Everybody except Clanricard.

"... But that the authors of this asininity have the excuse that they do not believe it themselves for a moment."

"Don't you think that the Great Powers are really trying to localise the conflict?"

"They may be."

"Not out of idealism, of course, or from horror of war, but because they are not ready, because the opportunity presents itself at the wrong time...?"

"I'll concede you all that. I'll grant you even more: that they may perhaps succeed in preventing the conflict. But if war is declared, I simply defy them to localise it. To begin with, as soon as Bulgaria attacks Turkey, the Serbs will not be able to resist the temptation to fall upon Bosnia-Herzegovina. You've seen the same dispatches from

Belgrade that I have ? I even discovered this morning that the Serbs date their claim to Bosnia back ' before the creation of the Empire of Charlemagne.' In so many words. Just think it over. Now, if Austria gets into the scrap, we shall all be in it."

" I realise that things are serious in that direction. In fact, fundamentally it strikes me as the most serious side of all. But what I hope, and Madame Argellati agrees with me, is that, if there is a Turco-Bulgarian conflict, the Serbs will finally decide to keep quiet."

" That's just the wish being father to the thought."

" Not at all. They are not ready to measure themselves against Austria. They have an interest in letting Bulgaria weaken herself. Besides, Russia would hold them back."

Clanricard listened anxiously. For him the pleasure of argument never masked the essential pungency of events. He said to Lauferque :

" You must see now that, whatever you may say, you do accept historical fatality – a sequence of events, all at once, about which nobody can do anything."

" About which nobody can do anything *any longer*. Ever since a certain moment. The 19th Brumaire. Even now I am persuaded that at any time there is always some point, somewhere, where one can take action. I tell you again that we have let ourselves be stupefied by the philosophy of history. The cult of the inevitable. Modern historical philosophers are the greatest malefactors since the Inquisition. I grant you that Bossuet is finished. But Hegel and Marx have started it again. They and the daily papers – there you have the best auxiliaries of the governments for crushing the peoples."

Legraverend, who thought himself a Marxist, and Louise Argellati, who had not read Marx, but venerated him among the saints in the Socialist calendar, protested, though without showing much annoyance. For Lauferque enjoyed a special tolerance in the company.

" I've mentioned Marx. Happily, there are Marxists who, unknown to themselves, betray the ideas of their master.

They play the Carbonaro ; and a very good thing, too. Hallo, I see Michelet's portrait over there. Now, there's a historian, if you like. Even if he's not any more true than the others, he's ten times more tonic."

"Tonic? Do you find him so?" objected Mathilde Cazalis. "With all the vileness that he shows us in the past, all the underhand intrigues, the crimes . . . ?"

"Exactly. A dagger-thrust, a vial of poison, even a fistula or a favourite, in the right place, at the right moment – and there you have history turned left or right. You feel that you are alive. That's the school of heroes. Whereas philosophical history is a drug, like Islam. . . ."

Clanricard listened without a smile.

As for Sampeyre, he cast his mind back over the history that he had once taught at the primary school. Hadn't he been addicted himself to the philosophy of history? Wasn't it against him that Laulerque was reacting so violently? Wasn't it himself that Laulerque was condemning? For that matter, his old pupil might be wrong. In any case, he was simplifying things too much.

Sampeyre, for his own part, had never denied the influence of individuals, or that of chance, either. The walls of his study testified that he rendered homage to great men – in accordance with his own estimation of them, to be sure. All the heroes whose faces looked down upon his daily life had been awakeners. None of them had trafficked in drugs. None of them had ever taught that the new world would be made all by itself. Wasn't Michelet up there? And Hugo? And Voltaire? . . . Besides, what if one generation contradicted the one before it a little? That didn't stand in the way of there being underlying liking, and influence too. The great thing was not to introduce one's own prejudices into these questions.

But Darnould was questioning Laulerque, in his slow but sure way.

"So that's what you have to tell us, eh? . . . I'll grant you all that. It may be defensible, like so many other theories. But this is a matter of urgency. For my part,

I'm afraid – simply afraid. I'm afraid for myself and for everything that seems important to me. I don't care whether you are right or wrong. But can you tell us any way of preventing what may otherwise happen? Of saving the things that matter?"

Clanricard looked at Darnould with a deep feeling of friendship. Darnould had just put into words what Clanricard was thinking at that very moment.

They made their way along the muddy path. To the left, high up, very remote, a stray lamp-post illuminated the far end of a suburban lane running between mean houses. But its light struck like a ray of moonlight as far as the path where the two men were walking. Quinette was surprised at it. He had asked himself first whether this light did not ricochet down from the sky, whether it was not the reflection of Paris. Now that he recognised where it came from, he still asked himself whether the reflection of Paris did not contribute to it.

He was surprised, too, at the muddiness of the path. Late in the afternoon, when he had come this way by himself, he had not noticed this mud. To what was it due? The weather was dry. To-night everything demanded Quinette's attention. Everything was important.

"What ideas you get into your head! They don't bear talking about!"

Here was Leheudry lying down on the job and arguing all over again. The best thing was to make no reply. He kept on talking; but he kept on walking. What little strength of will he possessed was frittered away in words.

"Yes, you're full of ideas, aren't you? It's a specialty of yours, from the looks of it. By way of tying things up, that suburban hole of yours wasn't enough, I suppose? You couldn't even leave me free to come and go as I liked. I'm not allowed even to speak to the concierge. I'm not just a bear by nature, you know. Oh yes, it was a fine inspiration of mine, that time when I went to that shop of yours! . . .

"This path is nothing but clay. We're going to be down

on our noses any moment. . . . Look here, it strikes me that you've got something worrying you, for all your giving yourself these airs of being so much cleverer than anybody else."

Every sentence came to Quinette's ears with a trace of anxiety about it, isolated between two silences in which he could hear the squelching sound that their soles made in the clay.

"According to your own story, you were going to arrange everything. And every time it's a bit worse than before. If you ask me, it was this visit of yours to her on Monday that put ideas into her head. All this story she told you about her husband getting suspicious and wanting to go to the safe himself is just imagination. Even if one admits that she ever did tell it to you."

Quinette was so exasperated that he could not restrain himself from retorting :

"She'll tell you so herself in the next few minutes."

"You fixed her up so that she feels she can't go on living as long as she knows that parcel is in the safe. But I saw her a couple of times afterwards. She wasn't worrying about it at all. I knew the girl well enough myself. . . . I knew I could depend on her. . . . And still I don't set up to be so clever as you. . . . Here are some rails now. I'm not walking along here just for the fun of breaking my nose. Look here : it was in case we were nabbed that you wanted me to come out without any personal papers in my pocket, wasn't it ?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's hardly worth while dragging me all this way if you're only going to take us somewhere where we may still get nabbed."

"You're not running any risk here. It was a general precaution that I was reminding you of. In a case like yours, there's an absolute rule : never go out with any documents on you. Or at least carry false ones. No initials on your suit, or on your linen, either. I told you to take any you had off, didn't I ?"

"I didn't have to take the trouble. I don't carry any

initials about on me. I'm not so dressy as all that. But, once you're nabbed, what difference does it make, anyway ? ”

“ I beg your pardon — it does. You might simply be rounded up in a raid. You give any name you like. The next day they let you go. They've nothing to keep that might put them on your track again. By the way, you've still got that card I gave you in your pocket, haven't you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And you remember the name ? ”

“ Yes. Léon Dufucet. It's a fool of a name. Besides, if they pinch us when we have the parcel on us, what good will it do ? ”

“ They're not likely to pinch us in the gallery without our having time to get rid of the parcel.”

“ But what about on the way back ? ”

“ You've made up your mind that you won't leave it there ? ”

“ In the gallery ? ”

“ Yes, certainly. That's partly why I chose it as a rendez-vous. I just want you to see what kind of a hiding-place I've picked for you. Just for the time being, while they're making inquiries, of course. You can go back there any time you like, just as you can to a safe-deposit in a bank, but without having to report to anybody. . . . So there you are ! ”

“ Just where any lousy son of a gun may stumble over it ! Nothing doing. I should say not. . . . But I was just asking you : what about on the way back ? You know it's full of family letters of mine, with all the names. Suppose they pinch us on the way back ? ”

“ On the way back ? . . . I hadn't thought about that. . . . ”

“ Couldn't you carry it yourself, at least as far as the Métro ? With that overcoat of yours, and your beard, nobody's going to cross-examine you.”

“ We'll see.”

“ And afterwards — what are we going to do with it ? Where am I going to put it ? ”

"I haven't thought about that yet."

The rails turned off towards the right. The place seemed more out of the way than ever. Leheudry kept on walking along the embankment, with stumbling feet. When he had missed his step several times in succession, his bad temper got the better of him again.

"Anyway, there were about thirty-six ways in which she could have given it back to me, without our coming and falling over our own feet in this damn hole."

"What ways?"

"She could have met us in a café."

"She didn't want to."

"Why not?"

"To be on the safe side, I suppose. Anyway, I didn't press her. It's too dangerous."

"With all the cafés there are to chose from? Think again!"

"A woman a bit upset, with a parcel like that under her arm, wandering up and down three or four streets looking for the place you said - it doesn't want much more than that for a policeman to pull her in. Sharing up the swag in a café! It's such a time-honoured wheeze!"

"Well, what about in the street, or in a square?"

"That's not much better. Besides, it seems to me essential that you should verify the contents of the parcel yourself. That's something you can only do under cover."

"Under her very nose?"

"No. I'll keep her talking meanwhile. You can take a quick look."

"Where did you say she was going to wait for you?"

"At the tram-car stop in the rue des Champeaux. There's a shelter there."

"Why shouldn't we both go straight there?"

"I don't see what you mean."

"You're not going to make me believe that in a suburban street like that, at this time of night, anybody is going to take any notice of us."

"But what about opening the parcel?"

"Oh, I trust the girl. I'm quite sure she hasn't touched it at all."

It was getting darker and darker. The light of the distant lamp still coloured the slightly misty air, but did not penetrate the darkness of the ground. The path got wider. You could sense a deep depression, with little hummocks rising out of it, dominated by high cliffs straight ahead.

Quinette took his electric flashlight out of his pocket, and switched it on for a moment. You could see cart-ruts running off into the clay, all awry. He switched the light off again.

Then he lowered his voice. He spoke in the tone of a man disclosing a rather delicate, confidential matter.

"I may as well tell you this, too. . . . I got the idea that she wanted to have a few moments alone with you. . . ."

As he spoke these words, he realised that they were giving him an odd sense of excitement himself. He imagined Sophie Parent at the end of the gallery ; not exactly naked, but with her clothes lifted up ; ready for love. He would possess her in the darkness. Or, rather, it would be that pretty little lady with the sad eyes who had come for her book that morning. It was she whom he would possess in the darkness ; or in the dim light of his pocket-flashlight, laid sideways on the ground. He was bound to possess her sooner or later. He could do so any time he liked now. How pleasant it was to feel that reawakening of virile energy !

But these same words of his wrapped Leheudry in a mist of intoxication. With something hoarse, something overheated, in his voice, he asked :

"Did she really tell you that ?"

"Not in so many words. What do you think ? . . . But that little girl has got you under her skin. . . . I couldn't suggest that you should meet her at the hotel . . . It would have been too risky."

Leheudry did not object or argue any longer.

"Is it far away, this tram-car stop of yours ? Will it take you long to get back ?"

"No. Only ten or fifteen minutes."

"Are you sure she will be able to find it?"

"I'm quite sure she will. I made a point of telling her the tram-line and the name of the stop."

"But what about me - where am I going to wait for you?"

"At the end of the gallery. I'm going to take you there first."

"I shall be all in the dark. . . ."

"I have another pocket-flashlight, that I can leave with you."

"It's not too messy on the ground, at the end of this gallery of yours?"

"Not at all. The ground is quite dry. In fact, I think there's some sand."

"No risk of running into any fellows having a doss there?"

"No, not in this direction."

"I can't make out how you find your way. For my part, I can't see a thing. We haven't even got the rails any longer. That's true, what you told me, isn't it - that you used to come to this place when you were in the police?"

"Yes."

"Give us a gleam of that lamp of yours, now and then, so that we can see where we're going. She's going to be horribly scared, that little Sophie of mine! I can't imagine how you managed to get her to come here. You have got a way with you sometimes. But look here - if we're going to have a few moments together, what will you do with yourself?"

"I'll wait at the entrance to the gallery. If there's any kind of danger, I'll give you warning."

"That's really nice of you. You've got some good sides to you, after all. You're not so bad, in your own way."

As they approached it, the high cliff became vaguely visible. But right in front of them this looming of it, almost imperceptibly greyish and ruddy, presented an

enormous gap. It was as though a gulf were turned upside down. It was as though the night rose straight up out of the ground.

Leheudry stopped.

"I can't get it into my head that Sophie is going to meet me down there."

"Is it the loneliness that impresses you?"

"It's not only the loneliness of it. It's the whole thing."

While Maurice Ezzelin, with his elbows on the dining table, was reading his evening paper, Juliette slipped away into the bedroom. She locked the door behind her, softly. She opened her wardrobe and rummaged among her lingerie. Her fingers could feel the book, in its new binding, lying side by side with the packet of letters.

The book had nothing in it which could arouse suspicion. She might let anybody at all see it. But somebody might want to open it, to look at it. Somebody might touch it. This book was the clandestine brother of her packet of letters. The two secrets must lie side by side, keep each other warm, protect each other.

Juliette was just snatching a few moments to make sure that they were still there. This evening it was not any letter in particular that she wanted to take out of the packet and read, standing beside her wardrobe, biting her lips to keep herself from crying, and ready to push everything back under her lingerie at the least sound. No. She had no desire for any one letter. She wanted all of them, or rather, the emanation of them as a whole. She was not recalling a moment of the past, one memory among other memories. She wanted to caress the past itself, as though it were a timid little animal lying crouched there under her lingerie.

All her life was here. All her life was gathered together, by a kind of miracle, within a space where the fingers of one hand had only to move a little way to travel over the whole of it. A whole life cannot be in the past, unless it be that the past is something that comes back. Letters are living things. The thoughts of letters go on escaping from them,

radiating from them. The thoughts of these letters penetrated into her book ; they glided between its pages ; they were wedded to the verses of the book.

Nothing is dead but things which have no more power. The little animal lying crouched under her lingerie was much stronger than a man such as some men are. If she had to choose, how could she hesitate ? A single one of the thoughts lying crouched under her lingerie was stronger than that poor head-piece out there, bending over its paper.

But the paper was rustling. The chair was scraping, too. Quick ! Spread out the lingerie quite smoothly. Close the door without a creak.

This alcove in the restaurant was almost as secluded as a private room. You reached it by a staircase a little difficult to find. The people dining downstairs did not even cast a glance in its direction. Besides, in this neighbourhood Gurau ran very little risk of meeting anybody who knew anything about him. In any case, even if people thought they recognised him, from having seen a photograph of him, they would certainly not know who Sammécaud was.

So he could not reproach Sammécaud with failing to take precautions. The man seemed to be speaking in good faith when he said that, whatever happened, their interview should remain a secret.

But this very sense of security made Gurau uneasy. It served only to make him realise better how incapable of avowal the whole business was. It occurred to him also that, since the beginning of the conversation, nothing had been said that really gave him a shock. Good Lord, how facile it all was ! Where society shows genius is precisely in its way of making things easy for you, turning into something like a pleasant slide transitions, changes of attitude, and also, alas, of altitude, which the mind of a man by himself thinks of solemnly as precipices and against which he erects a whole line of barricades.

A man by himself. There might be one somewhere who was thinking about Gurau at this very moment. That

young civil servant who had made up the case for him. How surprised he would be ! What a pity he wasn't there to listen, to take his part in the conversation and his share of responsibility for what happened !

"I go much further than you might think," said Sammécaud. "Not only do I believe that there will be a revolution ; I even believe that it is right, inevitable, that there should be one. I accept it. Though you can realise how much I stand to lose by it. I go still further than that. I believe that we must help it along. Not like fools, of course. Not like fanatics. Like reasonable men. Handle it in advance.

"Probably there isn't in the whole of France another man as capable as yourself of assuming the leadership of the revolution some day and making something really vital out of it, something that will get somewhere. . . . There, that's your destiny. And for my part, though it goes against all my own interests, I ask nothing better than to help you. Because I recognise that this kind of corruption, which I see pretty close up, simply can't go on. And because there is, on the other side, a force of idealism to which I respond. What you may call the artistic, or even the dilettante, side of life hasn't quite superseded everything else in me. When I told you that I don't understand anything about politics, I meant day-to-day politics, the intrigues, the alliances which result in M. Somebody's being elected or not being elected, or M. Somebody's overthrowing M. Somebody Else and grabbing his ministerial portfolio for himself.

"And it is because of all that, too, that I believe, in all sincerity, that a man should not spend himself in fighting this or that little abuse in particular. That's a job for underlings. When there is a whole society, a whole civilisation, to be transformed and put on its feet. Just assume, for the sake of argument, that we do not defend ourselves, and that without having to strike a blow you obtain some modification in our present system of oil importation. . . . In theory, several millions go into the pockets of the revenue authorities. But wait a moment. In the first place, we close down our seventeen factories. Naturally ! If they tax the oil we

import as refined oil, we shall simply do nothing but import refined oil.

"There's another thing. Who is going to pay the tax in the long run? The consumer. It is not in your power or in that of anybody else, in the present state of society, to prevent the continuation of our arrangement with Standard Oil. We shall preserve our monopoly as a matter of fact. The result will be that the old housewife, or the worker, who can now get his litre of petroleum at a reasonable price, will have to pay more for it. An indirect tax, levied on the poorest. Another result will be a check in the development of the motor industry. Ask Bertrand, for example, what he thinks about it."

Gurau slowly ate his dessert. He did not answer. He was absorbing the arguments with secret gratification.

"But we shall defend ourselves; openly at first, against the government, step by step. A vote in the Chamber will be of no value except as a pointer. We shall fight it out with the revenue authorities. Do you really think, for example, that it will be so easy to establish as a matter of fact, in a way which is juridically incontestable, that the oil that Standard sends us is a mixture specially manufactured, which has no right to the denomination of crude oil? . . .

"It is not for me to give you a hint about the means which we can use in that direction. But we shall defend ourselves also against you. You understand in what sense I say 'we.' You must have some idea already just how far this counter-attack of ours can be carried. Well, this enormous force which you propose to set in motion against you for the sake of such a paltry result—I guarantee to put it, in a large measure, at your own service, at the service of your ideas, of the cause about which we have just been talking, which is much more important than any detail of customs tariffs.

"This would simply be between you and me, of course—a kind of pact without witnesses, but one which would be sacred in my eyes. And I hope it would be supplemented by a friendship which I should regard as an honour, and also as an intellectual refreshment, an oasis, a means of

escape towards wider horizons, in the terribly commercialised life that I have to lead. . . . To begin with : your paper . . . I may tell you that it is your own, any time you like. And nobody to come and look over your shoulder. You see ? ”

Gurau took a sip of that Meursault, rich and vigorous as though it were fortified by iron, which was in his left-hand glass. Sammécaud's overtures, in which he had begun by finding nothing but an appeal to his weakness, had ended by producing in him a rather novel sense of excitement, a swift, bold reshuffling of his ideas, a faster beating of his heart. He had the impression, not that he was sliding down a gentle slope, but that he had arrived, by a path with surprising turns, at a kind of rock cornice, whence certain privileged persons could look out over a horizon – made up of sweeps of mountain, hollows of valley, wide expanses of sea – whose spaciousness and sense of liberty and unexpectedness could not even be suspected by the modest people, out for a Sunday walk, who must be coming and going in the little villages you could see down there.

Associations of ideas, cross-references, paradoxical confirmations sprang up in his mind.

“ After all, this is not so far away from Marx. Contempt for little day-to-day reform. Wait for the complete collapse and help it along. I can very well imagine Marx or somebody like him accepting a pact such as this. All the great revolutionaries, all those who succeeded, certainly seized any such opportunity when chance put it in their way. All great men of action are men who seize opportunities, who take whatever presents itself. Men who achieve great things are realists. A kind of Puritanism, a terrified, hide-bound respect for moral rules, is perhaps very necessary for men of limited scope and moderate courage. But nothing great has even been done without intellectual audacity, defiance of principle, which would have staggered little men. The Jesuits. Those past-masters. All the things they have tolerated, and even promoted, and all for no personal advantage. A. M. D. G. I can imagine one of the

future 'giants of '92,' in about 1780, for example, having a conversation like this with a tax-collector-in-chief."

He thought about Nietzsche, too. He caught a glimpse, without trying to define it yet, without seeking anything from it for the moment but a sense of heroism and pride – like the cheering of a crowd in the sun – of the idea of a union among the powerful, among the strong, a fraternity of the "great," whatever might be the nature of their greatness, high above the swarming of ordinary men, even above the deposit of doctrine. A kind of feudal fellowship.

The end of a meal, the sparkling of scores of objects intended for the pleasure of the few, the presence opposite him of a man by himself, filled to overflowing with power – all these circumstances helped his mind upon its way.

Quinette and Leheudry walked under the vaulted roof. Leheudry went first. It was he who held the electric flashlight. Quinette said to him :

"You take this. You'll see where you are going better. I'll keep the other one in reserve."

As a matter of fact, the ground was quite dry, and if you kept to the middle of the gallery, you walked on a soft dust which lessened the roughness underfoot.

The roof lowered little by little. Right ahead, it looked as though the gallery was going to end in a battered rock-wall. In a corner was something dark, which looked like a piece of clothing.

Leheudry stopped.

"A coat. There's somebody here."

"No, it's only an old rag."

Leheudry explored the walls of the passage with the beam of his flashlight. His companion told him :

"We have to turn to the right. You'll see. There's a smaller gallery, at right angles. Another minute and we'll be there."

Leheudry made no attempt to move.

"I'd just as soon wait for you here."

Quinette put on a tone of indifference.

"Just as you like. I would rather have shown you the place I mean. In case you don't like it. Besides, it's better to make sure that it's empty."

"Not likely to be any lice there, are there? She's particular, you know."

Quinette pushed Leheudry gently forwards.

"Come on, hurry up! We can't keep her waiting at that tram-car stop like this."

At last Leheudry entered the gallery at right angles. He kept on exploring the walls with the light of his torch.

"She'll never come to a place like this. Never in this world," he repeated. "You don't know her. You get such funny ideas. Never – not she!"

"Oh well, that's easily settled. She can wait outside, at the entrance to the gallery. She won't be afraid there. I'll come and fetch you."

"In that case, it's not worth while going any further."

"Of course it is! Just a little further. I didn't think you were such a coward as this."

Quinette felt for his pocket and plunged his hand into it.

"Hell!" said Leheudry; "I'm not going any farther."

He bent forward, with his feet a little far apart in the dust, humping his back. He still pointed his torch at the end of the underground passage. But its beam remained steady, like the stare of a terrified animal.

"What's that over there?" Quinette asked him suddenly, almost with a cry. "There, right in front of you! . . . Turn the light on it!"

He took advantage of the sound of his own words, and a noisy clearing of his throat with which he followed them, to cover a sliding and clicking of metal.

Leheudry recoiled a half-step backwards, but he was staring straight in front of him as hard as he could. He was trembling.

Quinette put his pistol within a couple of inches of the back of his head and fired twice, deliberately.

An instant later he found himself deafened, in complete darkness, enveloped in the smell of powder. He took just

enough time to ask himself whether he was not in his own bed in the rue Dailloud, just coming out of a nightmare. Then he took the second electric torch out of his pocket. He switched it on.

Leheudry lay at his feet, face downwards, his body oddly twisted. A fine smoke still hung in the air, mingled with settling dust. The other electric torch had fallen to the ground, some distance away from Leheudry.

"The battery may still be working. Anyway, mustn't leave any kind of trace."

He picked up the torch.

Then he made his way to the end of the passage, identified a cavity in the rock face on the left-hand side, fumbled in it, brushed away the dust, and took out of it a litre bottle full of a greenish liquid, and a big yellow sponge.

He went back to the body and examined it for a moment. Lacking though he was in experience of such matters, he was quite sure that the man was dead. He moved the body a little, not without difficulty, and turned it half over, so that the back of the head lay flat on the ground.

Then he tried to make the sponge balance on the face. But the sponge had a tendency to slip off, one side or the other. He had to dig a cavity in it with his pocket-knife, more or less corresponding with the outline of the nose, the forehead, and the cheek-bones.

When the sponge seemed to be steady, he uncorked the litre bottle and gently poured the liquid on to it. It was only then that he asked himself whether the two shots might not have been heard outside or by possible occupants of another gallery. But he asked himself the question with complete presence of mind.

His hand, which barely trembled, did not hurry as he went on pouring the green liquid on to the big sponge. It seemed to change colour, and it underwent, in all the cracks in its surface, shrivellings, shrinkings, sudden witherings, as though the liquid with which it was soaked and streaming was already beginning to consume it.



## SUMMARY



AS he eats his breakfast, Maurice Ezzeline, Juliette's husband, reads the paper of October 12th. In a hovel in the Vaugirard district the body of an old woman, murdered about a week ago, has just been discovered. Juliette goes to fetch her book. The job is not finished. Quinette has other things on his mind. Since that morning, when he read the news and realised that the crime has been discovered, he has been thinking out a plan of action. He begins by making a careful inspection of Leheudry's trunk.

Juliette, when she leaves the bookbinder's, surrenders to the spell of the October streets. She takes an omnibus, gets out of it, and goes and stands in the rue d'Ulm, opposite a railing. Meanwhile Quinette goes off to meet Leheudry, finds him in a bar, takes him inside Saint-Merri's Church, and questions him. The interrogation is continued in a café. The bookbinder learns that Leheudry has entrusted the "swag" to Sophie Parent, who keeps a stationery-shop in the rue Vandamme.

Wazemmes goes to take up his job with Haverkamp, who takes him to see his new quarters on the boulevard du Palais. On the way back, Wazemmes calls at the *poste restante* and finds a letter from the lady of the bus (Rita). Quinette visits the scene of the crime. He learns that the concierge caught a glimpse of Leheudry. Early in the afternoon he goes to see Sophie Parent and persuades her to hand the key of the safe where she is keeping the swag over to him. Then he busies himself about finding a new

hiding-place for Leheudry. He decides upon a little apartment situated on an inside courtyard in the faubourg Saint-Denis, where he proposes to instal a fake wall-paper store-house, with Leheudry as his clerk.

Nine o'clock at night. Wazemmes goes to his rendezvous with Rita, and this time unquestionably loses his virginity. In her dressing-room at the theatre, Germaine Baader is called upon by Jacques Avoyer, an emissary of the oil-dealers, who has been sent to acquaint her with their manœuvres for hemming in Gurau.

Quinette, lying in bed, goes over the events of the day and comes to the conclusion that he ought to go and tell the superintendent of police about the visit of the blood-stained "stranger" on October 6th, but giving a misleading version of it. Early the next morning he calls upon the superintendent. He gives a false description of the "stranger," which he has carefully invented. At de Champcenais's, council of war of the oil-dealers. De Champcenais goes to the Prefecture of Police, where a junior clerk communicates to him, with a myriad precautions, all available information about Gurau. Meanwhile Sammécaud makes Marie de Champcenais a declaration of his love for her, which is totally unexpected by both of them.

Jerphanion, summoned by Paul Dupuy, Secretary-General of the Training College, receives some useful advice about the tutoring which he is to give the Saint-Papoul's son. He meets Jallez. The two young men improve their acquaintance in the course of a long walk on the south side of the river. Gurau, whom Germaine has just told about Avoyer's threatening conversation, feels very bitter and goes for an aimless walk in the direction of Notre-Dame.

Quinette, at half past six in the evening, is summoned to the police-station. He is shown photographs of suspects. He pretends to recognise one of them, but not definitely. The police give him a rendezvous for nine o'clock. Meanwhile Quinette picks up Leheudry in a bar in the rue des Récollets, after having looked for him in vain in the faubourg Saint-Denis. Quinette's anger. The two men

walk along the Saint-Martin canal. Quinette dreams about what would happen if he got rid of Leheudry by pushing him into the canal. They part.

At police headquarters on the Quai des Orfèvres, Quinette has a conversation with a police officer about the canal and the quarries at Bagnolet, which he proposes to turn to account. Then he is confronted with several suspects. Quinette thinks it expedient not to "recognise" any of them. During the night Quinette drowns. Mingling of thoughts and nightmares. His dreams anticipate the action which he premeditates and represent it to him in advance.

Wednesday, October 14th. Nine o'clock at night. Several scenes are staged at the same time. Gurau and Sammécaud dine together. Sampeyre has a meeting of his "little group." Juliette looks at her letters. Quinette and Leheudry walk along the path which leads to the Bagnolet quarries. Sammécaud succeeds in winning Gurau's confidence up to a point. Sampeyre induces Laulerque to air his ideas about individual action. Quinette, dazzling Leheudry's eyes with the prospect of an imaginary meeting with Sophie Parent, lures him to the end of a gallery, kills him, and makes it impossible to identify the body.

## INDEX OF CHARACTERS

### NOTE REGARDING THE USE OF THIS INDEX

*This Index will figure at the end of every volume,  
and will be extended as necessary.*

*Roman numerals refer to the Book.*

*Large Arabic numerals refer to the Chapter.*

*Small Arabic numerals refer to the page.*

*If there is no page reference, this means that the  
character takes part in the whole of the Chapter  
indicated.*

*When a Chapter or page is given in brackets, this  
means that the character is involved, but does not  
take part personally in the action.*

#### EXAMPLES:

I, 10. Refer to Chapter 10, Book I, where the  
character plays an important rôle.

I, 18, 167. Refer to page 167, Book I (Chapter 18),  
where the character appears only incidentally.

II, (11). Refer to Chapter 11, Book II; a chapter  
which, as a whole, involves the character, though he  
is not personally present.

II, 15, (407). As above: the character is involved  
only on page 407.

*In the case of important events, the reference is pre-  
ceded by a brief summary of the event.*

*Proper names extraneous to the action, and intended  
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